

I WRITE AS I FEEL

BY

KHWAJA AHMAD ABBAS

[CHRONICLER]

CELEBRATED 1938



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To

S. A. BRELVI,

an Editor of rare integrity,
stern but not indiscriminate wielder of the blue pencil,
kindest and most lovable 'Boss',
but far-from-ideal paymaster,

and

to all my comrades and colleagues of

THE BOMBAY CHRONICLE

in grateful memory of twelve happy
years of starving together.

THE FIRST LAST PAGE

The first *Last Page* was never intended to be put between the covers of a book. The column began as a sort of pot-pourri to accommodate the editorial leftovers of *The Bombay Chronicle Weekly*—ends of verses and sayings of philosophers, occasional bits of news and views and gossip on a variety of topics. Nor was it originally intended to be a one-man show, and the first person plural was not an infringement of the 'editorial we', but represented the collective personality of several nameless 'Chroniclers'. Within a few weeks, however, for one reason or another, the other collaborators dropped out and the Page became solely my responsibility, though the 'we', along with the plural by-line, persisted for some time. (I must confess, however, that one of the pieces included in this volume for the sake of maintaining historical continuity is by no means 'all my own work'. I won't tell the reader which one it is but it should not be difficult to spot it out as it bears the unmistakable mark of fellow-Chronicler N. G. Jog's superior wit.)

The *Last Page* never laid any claims to literary distinction. Literature is not produced in the breathless tempo of a modern newspaper. Journalists are notorious for dashing off their stuff at the eleventh hour (sending it to the press, 'hot' from the typewriter) even when they write a weekly column. As my editor will endorse, with justifiable indignation, *The Last Page*, week after week, has reached his desk not at the eleventh hour but on the tick of the fifty-ninth minute of the twelfth hour. I am not particularly ashamed on this account, though I am conscious of the trouble I caused to the editor and the printers. For in a world and at a time when the national and international situation is liable to fluctuate every hour, one cannot risk going to the press too early with one's column. And so for six years and more, Thursday evenings and Friday mornings, this Page has been dashed off on a battered old typewriter, the keys of which are by now attuned to the tempo of world events. The Page has been

written not only at high pressure but in the oddest places. For a perpetual tramp like me, it has been by no means an easy task to keep the column going, with only eight or nine blank Sundays in six years! So, on different occasions it has been written in cross-country trains, hotel rooms in Simla and Lahore, waiting rooms on railway station platforms, in a dak bungalow in the remote interior of Kashmir, at least twice in an aeroplane in flight, and once in the press gallery of the Central Assembly!

As the *Page* developed from a miscellany of odd bits and pieces into a regular and compact feature, it acquired a definite character and a specific purpose—to reflect and recapture the mood of the country and the world. Not like the conventional, leisured artist, in a pose of tranquillity, but in vivid action—like a candid camera snap! I have been what may be described as a ‘subjective reporter’, concerned not so much with collecting objective news but with ‘chronicling’ the emotional, *human* background of news. What I have written, therefore, has been necessarily coloured by my own views and thoughts and feelings. ‘Subjectiveness’, I have been assured, is my chief failing. For what has appeared on *The Last Page*, I have been variously described and dismissed as a ‘sentimental *petit-bourgeoise*’, ‘an emotional dupe of the Communists’, ‘a middle-of-the-road Marxist’, and the most consistent of all the Nehruites—including Nehru! I shall be the last to challenge any of my critics. They are welcome to their opinions. There is sufficient evidence to show, however, that a fairly large number read *The Last Page*, many of them because it reflects their own views and their own reactions to various developments in the country and abroad. Not all of them are sentimental, impressionable youths.

It was not without a thrill of joy that I learnt in 1945 that distinguished national leaders, then interned in Ahmednagar Fort were regularly reading *The Last Page*. Since then substantial quotations from the *Page* have been incorporated in the official history of the Indian National Congress, not to mention other books. Surely that ought to be vindication enough for a weekly perpetration by a journalist. At any rate it encouraged me to bring out

the present volume, which has been compiled with the aim of presenting the many-sided picture of India and the world during the last six crucial years. An attempt has been made to reflect the variety of topics discussed on this Page and at the same time to present a more or less complete sequence of national and international events. Only one serious omission will be noticed—the arrests of the national leaders on August 9, 1942, and the country-wide upheaval that followed them. This gap could be filled now, but I let it remain, if only as a reminder of the comprehensive, Fascistic censorship clamped down on the press at that time.

A few words of personal explanation. As sometimes happens, but for no fault of mine, within a few months the mask of anonymity began to slip off the Chronicler's face. By now the pseudonym used in the by-line has become more a convention than a cloak to hide the identity of the writer. I hope, therefore, that I am revealing only an open secret by publishing this book under my name.....

K. A. ABBAS

CONTENTS

PAGE

1941

We Eat Our Hats !	...	3
The Death of Tagore	...	5
Nehru in Jail	...	6
Lionel Fielden Calling '	...	7
The Dance of Machines	...	9

1942

Of Movies and Morals	...	13
Brahmin Patron of Urdu	...	15
Paper, Peace and War !	...	17
Rs. As. Ps. of Art	...	19
Hello, Are You Dead ?	...	22
' Muslim Girl '	...	23
Prelude to Cripps ?	...	25
Covering Cripps	...	26
The People's Theatre is Born	...	30
Gandhiana	...	32
The Reds Arrive	...	34
Urdu, Hindi, Hindustani !	...	36
Nehru on 'Time ' Cover	...	38
Hello, Boys !	...	41
' Quit India ' !	...	42
Lenin Smiles !	...	45
The Voice	...	50
Where, Oh, Where ?	...	53
Charity and Exploitation	...	54
Lies Unlimited	...	56
Of Caps and Beards !	...	60

1943

Bread and Revolution	...	66
He Died for China	...	70
Our Turkish Guests	...	74

	PAGE
Who Wins if Gandhi Loses ?	77
The Ordeal is Over !	80
He is No Longer Twenty-five	83
A Kiss that Shook the World !	85
They are Tough !	86
They Called Him Chink	88
No Apple-pies for Amery	89
The End of a Dictator	91
Another August 8 !	93
Fifth Column	94
Liberty and Loin Cloth	95
Am I Going Mad ?	98
The Hungry Do Not Sleep	100
Friends of the Soviet	103
Bengal—1943	105

1944

'Naughty Girl of India'	111
A Nation Mourned Her Death	115
A Train Leaves for 'Nowhere'	117
New Delhi Round-the-Clock	121
Anand Bhawan Receives a Guest	128
Released !	133
Gandhiji in Juhu	133
'Not Done !'	135
'This is It !'	138
Zero Hour that was not	140
The Palm and the Peepul	143
Suspense	144
When Superstition is Not Superstition !	148
Christmas Eve, 1944	150

1945

Road to Freedom	153
Where is Hitler ?	155
Salute to the Red Army !	158
Blood and Water	160
Listen, Uncle Sam !	163
The House of Lost Souls	174

	PAGE
Our Local Gestapo	177
Hitler is Dead but...	179
N-E Day Montage	182
The Men in Police Files	186
'If Thou wouldst not fight...'	188
'Our Mother and Our Sister'	190
Land of Liberty?	193
This is Simla	196
Two Men—and a Crowd'	200
The End of the Old-School-Tie	201
Merrily We Go to Hell!	201
Those Who Rule By the Sword	203
The Paradox of Bose	210
Argument by Blood	214
That might have been Me'	216
Of Princes and Poets	219
What Price Clarity?	222
Not Guilty!	224
Paradoxes of the Punjab	227
Dear Mr Jinnah	231
The House that Gandhi Built	233
1946	
'It is the Atom Bomb'	237
Bengal in Re-Birth	238
Obituary for Nobody	245
Seth Sonachand's Nightmare	246
Sweepers on Strike	258
Another Bastille Falls	261
Testament of a Friend of the Jews	263
While They Talked at Simla...	266
When Freedom Comes...	273
Revolt in Heaven	279
From Palme Dutt to Pepita	282
Benthalls Must Lose	284
'I Remember—I Remember'	290
1,0000 Feet above Reality	296
It Tolls for Thee!	300
This is Lahore	305
Garden of Martyrs	317

1947

	PAGE
The Melody that is No More	313
Where is My Sense of Humour ?	315
Who Killed India ?	318
The Shape of Freedom	321
Disaster	323
Letter to a Child Born on August 15	331
The End is The Beginning	338

I 1941

**When Hitler's armies goose-stepped into
the Soviet Union and Democracy hit
back—with The Last Page!**

WE EAT OUR HATS !

—July 6

There has been a terrible dearth of hats in the market for the last two weeks, to be precise, since the day Hitler's legions goose-stepped into the rolling plains of Russia.

Hats have simply disappeared from the streets and shops, from heads and pegs. Old hats and new hats, white hats and khaki hats, small hats and big hats, high hats and low hats, swell hats and battered hats—all, all have disappeared. There has been a veritable epidemic among hats.

Where have all those hats gone? Who is the Pied Piper of Hatelin who has done the vanishing trick with the topers and puggies, the Fezes and the Felts?

Take a close look at the fellow in the illustration alongside. Can you guess who he is?—Yes. You are right. He is a composite representation of our Foreign Editor and the War Expert. The spindly legs belong to the former and the globular tummy to the latter. And the hat is their joint property. They are eating it with a deadly earnestness (look at the determined stance!), even with a resigned relish!



So you see where all the hats have gone?—Into the stomachs of the Foreign Editor and the War Expert, the Diplomatic Correspondent and the Military Observer, the Parliamentary Reporter and the Key-hole Specialist !

Not only of *The Chronicle*, not only of the other Bombay papers, but of the press all over the world. The chap above who is exhibiting this gastronomic feat for your delectation is symbolic of the race of newspaper scribes....

'A war between Germany and Russia seems to be out of the question,' observed our Foreign Editor the very day before the invasion. 'A colossal hoax,' said our War Expert actually after Hitler had ordered his army to march into Russia. And 'No German-Russian War' was the chorus in London and New York, Vichy and Vladivostok.

And so you see why they are eating their hats.... whatever hats that come to their hand ! Hence the dearth of hats in town, and hence the extra-sapient stuff that has been appearing in your paper for the last two weeks. It is all due to the undigested hats—thanks to the biggest mad-hatter of all history, Adolph Hatier—alas Mein Fuehrer !

And if, gentle reader, you too were privately pronouncing upon the war, you also are welcome to gobble your own hat...

THE DEATH OF TAGORE

—August 17

Tagore is dead. Long live Tagore !

From one end of the country to the other, this cry goes up, a cry of lamentation, but, strangely, also a cry of exultation. For, when a man like Tagore dies, it is not annihilation but immortality. If the soul is deathless, as Tagore himself believed, then for him it is not the end but the beginning of an enchanted adventure, the stepping out from the world of the flesh into the rarefied realm of the spirit.

Tagore was many things to many men in his life. Versatility seldom goes with genius, but Tagore was an exception. Perhaps the most versatile genius of this century.

Essentially an artist, his art flowered in so many different forms. He was a poet, playwright, musician, painter and actor. He wrote novels, plays, short stories, essays, *belles lettres*, philosophical and metaphysical treatises, political pamphlets. He conducted one of the world's greatest seminaries, Shantiniketan, he gave discourses on religion and ethics, planned and looked after the garden, and even took a keen interest in the agricultural problems of his tenants.

In Tagore's case genius was not the concentration of intellectual energy in one channel of activity, but rather the branching out of the tree of knowledge, like the holy banyan, each branch reaching down and taking strength from the soil, thus preserving rather than dissipating the life-giving sap of the central trunk.

Tagore is dead.

Tagores never die !

NEHRU IN JAIL

—November 23

A glimpse into the Dehra Dun jail cell which houses Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru is provided by the following extracts from one of his letters to his sister, quoted in an article in *The National Herald*, Lucknow :

‘Physical risk and suffering are after all petty as compared with the troubles and tempests of the mind. And whether life is soft or hard, one can always get something out of it—but to enjoy life ultimately one must decide not to count the cost.... I am definitely thinner in the right places, and that you will agree is all to the good... My body had grown stiff and I could not balance it properly. Now I have gone back to form, and every morning as the dawn is creeping in, I stand gracefully on my head to welcome it. I get up very early, with the stars shining away brightly, and I go to bed equally early.’

‘Perhaps,’ once wrote Jawaharlal, ‘it is easier to develop an organic sense of life in the solitude of confinement than in this mad world of war and politics, of Fascism and Imperialism.’

There is no doubt, indeed, that every fresh imprisonment has meant to him an opportunity for intellectual and literary activity.

It was in jail that he wrote *Whither India?*, the series of articles which changed the entire course of the national movement and forced the Congress to take note of economic issues from the socialist standpoint. It was in jail again that he wrote *Letters To A Daughter* and also, later, the monumental sequel to it, *Glimpses of World History*. And it was in the same Dehra Dun jail that he wrote his Autobiography. Today, he is busy writing a new book, *Rediscovery of India**, which is said to be based on his recent intensive study of ancient Indian history both political and cultural.

By the way, not many people remember his first book *Soviet Russia*, written in 1929 on his return from an extensive European tour. It was excellent ‘reportage’, and on reading it one felt that the gain to Indian politics had been a loss to Indian journalism.

* *Discovery of India* was published in 1946.

LIONEL FIELDEN CALLING !

—November 23

Do you remember Lionel Fielden ?

No, you don't. Or, perhaps, you do. He was our first Controller of Broadcasting, brought over from England with a great flourish and fanfare and then packed off without so much as a 'Thank You'.

There seemed to be some mystery behind Lionel Fielden's sudden and unceremonious departure from India. Some said he was called up for more important work by the B.B.C., others thought the post of Controller was being Indianized.

Some light is thrown on this mystery by the publication of an article by Fielden in *The New Statesman and Nation*. The article is about the expanded Executive Council. Fielden does not like it. It is also, by implication, obvious that the sun-dried bureaucrats could not have liked a man who had the temerity to suggest that 'Indians want freedom just as much as we do, the same freedom that Churchill wants,' and goes on to say :

'So long as Nehru, the friend of England and the true leader of young India, sits in a damp jail (the roof of which has lately fallen in), and is allowed to receive one letter a fortnight, I cannot help feeling that Indians ought not to accept responsible posts under the British Raj.'

Indeed, on the very first day of his arrival in India, Fielden did something which provoked the ire of the bureaucrats. He gave an interview to one of us, the 'Chroniclers', in the course of which he was indiscreet enough to declare that as the first Controller of Broadcasting it would be his aim to make All-India Radio a mirror of national life.

Pointedly asked whether he would invite Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and other Congress leaders to broadcast, Fielden categorically stated, 'Of course, All-India Radio would not be worth its name if it does not bring people like Gandhi and Nehru to the microphone.'

Poor fellow! Fresh from a set of progressive intellectuals in London, little did he know what he was letting himself in for. Next morning wires hummed from Bombay to New Delhi and back, Fielden was immediately asked to come to the imperial capital and there he was properly placed on the carpet.

Not only was Fielden frankly told to lay off such 'revolutionary' ideas as asking Gandhi and Nehru to broadcast but also given a few lessons in bureaucratic etiquette.

The journalist, while writing up the interview, had mentioned that the new Controller of Broadcasting met him informally, sitting bare-footed and cross-legged on a sofa, with his sleeves rolled up and collar wide open.

But that is *not* how a high Government official is expected to meet journalists—much less reporters from Nationalist papers. Fielden had grievously sinned against the imperialist sartorial code and when the time came, he was made to pay for it.

THE DANCE OF MACHINES

—December 21

Uday Shankar has done it again !

His 'Rhythm of Life' ballet, when staged for the first time two years ago, had created a flutter in the dove-cotes of the Art-for-Art's-sake-wallahs, who believe that only mythological legends and not the realities of contemporary life should be interpreted in terms of dance. To these blind votaries of tradition, a dancer appearing in a Gandhi cap was an iconoclast defying the gods of classical art.

'Labour and Machinery', his latest ballet seen last week in Bombay, will cause even more heart-burnings among these 'snobosseurs'. For this ballet has further developed and almost perfected the technique Shankar first used in 'Rhythm of Life' to interpret political, social and economic phenomena through the medium of the dance.

As in 'Modern Times' Chaplin discarded the cap-and-bells of the clown to don the robes of a philosopher, so in 'Labour and Machinery', Shankar exchanges the role of a dancer for the role of a critic of life.

And through a medium that he understands and has mastered, in terms of rhythm, movement and gesture, he gives us his analysis of the social break-up of the Indian village community by the intrusion of industrialism. And instead of legendary gods and goddesses he puts real, live human beings on the dance stage !

He shows us happy peasants leading a simple but contented and harmonious life, full of rhythm born of free movement, and colour borrowed from nature. Then comes the machine and the graceful human beings are turned into soulless automatons, their movements now angular instead of rhythmic, their clothes drab and shapeless instead of being picturesque and colourful, their faces turned into expressionless masks, as they dance the weird dance of the machine—to the tune of the capitalist exploiter.

In the final movements of the ballet Shankar offers a solution too—Back to the land, and goodwill and harmony between the haves and have-nots! With this solution, of course, many (including ourselves) will have cause to differ.

Shankar is not the first to use ballet for criticism of life. For many years it has been done in Russia, which, as you know, is the country where the art of ballet has reached its highest artistic level. And even in America, at a time when musical shows of the Ziegfeld variety had monopolized Broadway, a band of young artists and intellectuals combined with Trade Union workers to produce a highly successful song-and-dance show, 'Pins and Needles', which was from start to finish a comment on American and international politics.

The 'Chronicler', who happened to see the show in New York in 1938, recalls the most uproarious climax—Hitler and Mussolini and the Mikado dancing a crazy combination of the goose-step, Geishas' cherry-blossom dance and the rhumba, and knocking one another down with feathers.

It was highly symbolic. Could it have been prophetic?

1942

...The end of the Crippsian Illusion and the
Beginning of the August Struggle

OF MOVIES AND MORALS

—January 4

Is acting in the films an immoral career ?

A correspondent, writing to us, raises the question and goes on to observe :

‘ The vicious atmosphere inside the film studios is the real factor deterring parents from choosing films as a career for their children, and if decent people of noble parentage and good education have to be attracted to film-land, both for the sake of their own careers and for the betterment and improvement of the quality of our films in all directions, this vicious atmosphere has to be changed.’

Now the ‘ Chroniclers ’ have no pretensions to being professors of ethics. It has been suggested by some people that, like the film studios, our Page, too, has a ‘ vicious atmosphere ’—because we have the audacity to write about and discuss ‘ vicious ’ subjects like Sex in Prisons, campaign against Syphilis, Artificial Insemination and ‘ Birth of a Baby ’ !

And yet for the sake of our correspondent quoted above and others like him among our readers, we may lay down a few facts for their consideration.

In the ancient days when man had not built for himself an artificial civilization of taboos, superstitions and irrational prejudices, dancing and singing and mimicry were a part of healthy communal life—a part of religion itself. Everyone was a dancer, everyone was a singer, everyone entertained everyone else ! They were all actors and singers and so naturally, no stigma was attached to the arts of entertainment.

It was only later on, during the decadent feudal period that kings and courtiers, to satisfy their personal vanities, founded the institution of professional entertainers—slave girls, concubines, eunuchs, court dancers, court musicians, sing-song girls, mimics, clowns, buffoons, etc., etc. Kings and noblemen retained these entertainers for their personal

amusement. And what was once an expression of all that is beautiful in life was reduced to the vulgarities and perversions of a mercenary profession. No wonder that a stigma came to be attached to those who painted and sang and danced to please the whims of potentates (and impotentates!) or their feudal forerunners.

But no longer need Art be debased, no longer are artists merely the playthings of the rich. Not individual plutocrats but the mass of the people today pay for the services of artists and instead of pandering to the whims and fancies of kings and nobles, the artists have to be guided by the impersonal box-office—which, after all, is another name for public opinion. This public may be uninformed and often displays bad taste, but at least it does not demand of artists participation in sex-orgies!

But, among the other irrational prejudices that still persist, we continue to brand the artists as immoral—a sort of inferior species!

An incidental but relevant issue: What is immorality? And who is immoral?

Is a capitalist exploiter moral? Is a writer who sells his soul for money moral? Is a woman who marries for money moral? Is a doctor who sells quack medicines moral?

And even if immorality is synonymous with unconventional sexual behaviour, aren't there many libertines among doctors and lawyers and priests and clergymen and members of so-called 'society'?

The atmosphere in a film studio is no more vicious than in any other place where men and women work in close proximity. Occasional cases of emotional attachments and sexual adventures are as natural in a film studio as in a co-educational college.

The atmosphere of any place is the sum total of the character of its occupants. It does not need a philosopher to prove that the cultural refinement of the films and film studios will be in direct proportion to the number of refined and cultured people engaged in this work.

Here is an apposite postscript to any discussion on morality. (Lin Yutang, the Chinese humanist and philosopher, says : 'There are some people who are too moral to be good; there are others who are too good to be moral.'

Need we say we are all for the latter !)

BRAHMIN PATRON OF URDU

—January 25

Is Urdu the language of the Muslims ?

This question is sometimes asked and even some otherwise enlightened nationalists are known to have expressed the opinion that 'Urdu is the religious language of the Muslims'.

But do you know that all the Hindu Mahasabha organs of the Punjab are published in Urdu ? Some of the best-known literary journals of the U. P. are edited by Hindus. The two greatest novelists of the Urdu language were Ratan Nath Sarshar and Munshi Premchand.

And do you know who is the President of the *Anjuman Taraqqi-e-Urdu* (the Association for the propagation of Urdu) ?

He is Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, a Brahmin of the bluest blood, jurist, scholar, statesman and man of culture.

More interesting than any of the persons he has described in his reminiscences, published recently, is his own personality, which sums up and symbolizes all that is best in the culture that is the common heritage of Hindus and Muslims of Northern India.

Polite of tongue, elegant of gesture, dignified with a charm that comes from good breeding and good education, and having a sense of humour that has neither malice nor sarcasm in it, Sir Tej Bahadur belongs to the line of Motilal Nehru, Hakim Ajmal Khan and Doctor Ansari. A scholar of Urdu and Persian, he is deeply interested in and keeps in constant touch with literary activities. He has made the cause of the Urdu language his own and in its service has given much time, energy and money. Recently he has started in Allahabad an association known as *Rookh-e-Adab* (Spirit of Literature) for the propagation of Urdu and the cultural unity of Hindus and Muslims.

His friends include Hindus and Muslims of all shades of political opinion, and though he has remained a steadfast Liberal nationalist, that has not impaired his friendly relations with Congressmen on the one hand and Muslim Leaguers on the other.

In his autobiography, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru recalls an interesting incident about Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru which is almost symbolic. Pandit Motilal had built a swimming pool in his house and invited his friends to make use of it. Tej Bahadur came, sat at the edge of the pool, but refused to take the plunge. The man of culture was afraid even of the placid waters of the pool. No wonder he keeps away from the whirlpools and cross-currents of active politics.

PAPER, PEACE AND WAR!

—January 25

Last week the members of the editorial staff of *The Bombay Chronicle* gathered round their editor's desk for an unusual conference. Agenda: How to squeeze increased amount of news into decreased number of pages?

The meeting, paradoxically enough, was not open to the press and the reporters were judiciously excluded. The proceedings, which were lively, cannot, therefore, be divulged. But we may mention that proposals ranged from the abolition of editorials altogether to the limitation of the 'Half Column' to that much space and no more! We are happy to report that no one suggested the deletion of 'The Last Page'. Indeed, with the introduction of the smaller type you will get more reading matter on your favourite page!

This paper shortage business, frankly speaking, is rather an unfair and almost below-the-belt attack upon the freedom of the Press. The long-winded leader-writer, the chatty columnist, the verbose reporter, the self-complacent mofussil correspondent—henceforward they are all to be gagged and muzzled! With the price of gum and foreign journals going up steeply, even the scissors-and-paste expert must exercise self-restraint. It is like issuing rationed bullets to an army!

Paper! Oh, paper, how many million lies and libels have been printed on thy white smooth face?

It is fascinating to speculate what would have been the history of the world if paper had never been invented. For one thing, *Mein Kampf* would never have come to be printed. Nor would Hitler have had to put his signature to treaties which he had every intention of repudiating and tearing up even before the ink was dry!

Imagine a world without paper—without the morning newspaper, the evening newspaper, the Sunday paper, the illustrated magazine the shilling shocker novels, the price lists and catalogues, the tickets and stamps and coupons, and you will soon find it to be a world of peace, if not exactly of

plenty! It would not have been bad if the Chinese had kept the secret for another couple of thousand years.

Yes, like most other things in the world, paper also was invented in China nearly 3,000 years ago—when Europeans lived in caves and dressed in skins!

Ts'ai Lun, who invented paper, was a courtier of the Chinese Emperor Ho-Ti. For five hundred years the Chinese jealously guarded his secret and it took Europe nearly a thousand years to master the art of paper-manufacture.

The Chinese invented powder to use for fireworks and to amuse themselves. Marco Polo carried it to Europe and the result is—guns and rifles and cannon and bombs and machine-guns.

Similarly, the paper which Ts'ai Lun had intended for the use of poets and philosophers was used in the West for hurling abuse at political opponents, for jingo and imperialist propaganda, for spreading the many creeds of hate and evil 'isms'.

RS. AS. PS. OF ART

—February 3.

The Town Hall of Bombay is meant to be one of the city's most impressive buildings, but neither its exterior nor its interior is in any way inspiring.

Now and then a poorly-attended meeting or a Charity Ball is held within its precincts. The Sheriff is entitled to hold his meetings and give his parties in the Town Hall and sometimes he actually does give a party if not hold a meeting.

Also every year the Bombay Art Society holds its Exhibition and the drab white walls of the Town Hall are covered with colourful canvases and the straight angles of the large rectangular room are relieved by the masses and curves of sculpture. For two weeks the ghosts are driven away and human voices echo in the hall.

Now we know these Art Exhibitions, even, if we know little about art (with or without the capital 'A'!). And this year's exhibition doesn't seem to us to be radically different from any other year. There are the same patches of colour labelled 'Modern'; the same figures with unnatural physiognomy (fingers as long as pencils and eyes that look like needles) which Chughtai popularized; the same gods and goddesses with blue faces; the same trees and flowers and butterflies.

The exhibits on the wall are practically the same. The exhibits within the walls are even more unchanged. There are the complacent bourgeoisie—the patrons of Art—who are seeking 'just a bit of colour for our morning room, my dear'.

Then there are the sophisticates who would rather die than admit they don't know whether surrealism is an advanced form of Bolshevism or some other kind of disease. The 'snobosseurs', of course, view everything with a superior air of 'objective' aloofness—for haven't they gazed on 'Mona Lisa' in the Louvre at Paris and drunk beer with long haired artists in the cafes of Montmartre?

To (the not so classless) 'society', of course, the Art Exhibition is an occasion—like the races, the Governor's Garden Party, the Flower Show or the New Year's Eve

Dance at the Taj—to display one's best sari and the latest *coiffure*. It is *the* thing to go to the Art Exhibition—'Oh yes my dear, it is so utterly cute and all the lovely artists with long hair and everything, I am told they are all broke and starving, but so wonderful I simply adore them!'

It is about one of these artists that we propose to write today.

There are so many jokes about long-haired artists that we forget that many of them have long hair simply because they have not the money to get a hair-cut.

You don't believe us, of course. A hair-cut costs only a couple of annas, you say. But suppose you had to choose between a hair-cut and a meal, or between a hair-cut and a piece of canvas to paint a picture, would you still vote in favour of the hair-cut?

K. H. Ara, the artist we are going to talk about, does not sport long hair. In fact, if you saw him you would never think he is an artist. You would perhaps think he is a motor cleaner or a garage mechanic. And that is what he is. A mechanic by profession, an artist by instinct! Until recently he was drawing a salary of Rs. 22 per month.

Consider the budget of an artist; Rs. 22 per month for food, lodgings, clothes, tram fare, brushes, paints, canvas, paper, pencils, crayons, frames, entrance fees for exhibitions!

And yet for the last 15 years K.H. Ara has been painting—painting anything and everything, landscapes, portraits, in classical style and in modern style, in oils and water colours. He has experimented with pointalism and cubism, he has drawn from life and from imagination. And today his sole possessions in the world are about three hundred paintings and sketches. He has no money to get them framed and they lie rolled up in his little room—the dust and the damp eating away what may be great pieces of art.

It is not that he has not received any recognition. In the last four years he has won as many as eight prizes from the leading Art Exhibitions in India. Last year the Governor bought one of his pictures in Poona and this year four of his pictures were hung in the Town Hall, one of which won a prize of Rs. 50 and was highly commended.

But has this proletarian artist—entirely self-educated, who has never attended an Art School, who has picked up

different styles merely by looking at illustrations in Art books in public libraries, who has to work ten hours a day cleaning and repairing cars, who doesn't get enough to eat and who for want of money, has sometimes had to paint on *both* sides of a canvas or a square of plywood—has he had a chance in this world? Ponder this question, all you Patrons of Art, Connoisseurs, Collectors and Fashionable Artists!

But if you feel like pitying K.H. Ara, save your precious tears. For this young man needs neither pity nor patronage. Whether you know of him or not, he will continue to paint; for that is his life. If he has no money to buy canvas, he will paint on the reverse side of all his existing paintings. And if he exhausts them and still he has no money, he will paint on the walls of his room—like Gauguin!

But a society which allows the K.H. Aras to starve while second-rate foreign artists flourish in expensive studios has need to pity itself."

* K. H. Ara has gained a fair amount of recognition since this was written. It has been announced that he is shortly to go on a study tour of Europe.

HELLO, ARE YOU DEAD ?

—February 22

Dame Rumour, that awful, evil-tongued, gossiping female, has turned to more diabolical crimes. She is now committing murders in broad daylight !

The latest 'victim' was the well-known film star, Leela Chitnis. But we can assure her, from personal experience, that such rumours can only bring her good luck and longer life. The 'Chronicler' was reported to be dead some years ago but, up to the time of writing, nothing more than a chronic cold has happened to him.

Mark Twain, the famous American humorist, was once lucky enough to read his own obituary in a newspaper and wired to the editor : 'NEWS OF MY DEATH SLIGHTLY EXAGGERATED.'

Then there was the local night reporter who rang up an invalided distinguished journalist in the early hours of the morning and asked for confirmation of his reported demise. The 'victim' in this case, being both a journalist, and a humorist, replied with a chuckle that he had heard no such report but would like to make some enquiries.

And only recently the Sind Assembly actually passed a condolence resolution on the basis of the rumoured demise of Mr M A Jinnah. Happily, the report was found to be false within a few minutes and that part of the proceedings was expunged. And in this case, too, we are sure the rumour bespeaks long life for the Muslim League leader.

‘MUSLIM GIRL’

—March 1

Looking at Doris Gerrard's catalogue, we came across two titles ‘No. 6, Muslim Girl In Patna’ and ‘No. 10, Muslim Girl’. We liked both these sculptures but we have something to say about these titles.

We do not know if the artist gave those titles without much thought, for want of a better choice, just because her models happened to be Muslims. Or does she imply that a Muslim girl is a racial and ethnological type different from a Hindu Girl or a Christian girl? Because, if that is the implication, it is patently false.

But unfortunately, in this land of ‘Hindu *pani*—Muslim *pani*’ everything acquires a communal label—whether it is water or tea or a criminal. ‘Muslim Arrested For Burglary’, ‘Hindu Boy Convicted’—any day one can read such headlines in papers. As if the religion of their fathers had anything to do with the misdeeds of these delinquents!

Like Doris Gerrard, thousands of well-meaning people are unconsciously helping to perpetuate communal differences by talking in terms of Hindu and Muslim—when such differentiation is entirely irrelevant and unnecessary. We are sure if the two beautiful heads in Doris Gerrard's exhibition were re-labelled, ‘Hindu Girl’ and ‘Hindu Girl In Patna’, no one would mark the slightest incongruity. Race and climate and economic circumstances no doubt, leave their mark on human features—but not religion!

In a subtle, yet effective manner, Shantaram brought home this point to millions of cine-goers when in his film, *Padosi*, he gave the role of Thakur to Mazhar Khan and cast Gajanan Jagirdar as Mirza.

Much of the nonsense we hear about cultural differences of Hindus and Muslims is based on sheer ignorance about our own country.

A certain lady of our acquaintance—a cosmopolitan and cultivated person—remarked that she liked the ‘Muslim dress’ that the girls wear in the film *Khazanchi*. She meant

the *shalwar*, *odhni* and long shirt that all Punjabi women wear, irrespective of whether they are Hindus or Muslims or Sikhs.

The other day a friend of ours, who happens to be a Hindu, called at our office dressed in *sherwani* and tight pyjamas. After he left, a colleague remarked, 'Is that Muslim Leaguer friend of yours gone?' We explained that far from being a Muslim Leaguer he was not even a Muslim, and discovered that our colleague had been misled by his dress. But long before Mr Jinnah ever sported a *sherwani*, cultured, high-class Hindus of the U. P. like Pandit Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru had been wearing the dress which our colleague mistakes as a uniform of the Muslim League.

Preconceived notions about the outward appearance of members of different communities are liable to cause amusing howlers. For instance, an American journalist once described Doctor Moonje as 'a devout Muslim'—because of his beard. of course!

And, then, there was the son of a Muslim who was having an argument with his father about the religious significance of beards. 'If you don't grow a beard,' said the old man, 'on the day of judgment you will be mistaken for a Hindu.'

'I don't mind,' replied the son. 'I shall be taken for a follower of Jawaharlal while you will be taken for a follower of Doctor Moonje.'

PRELUDE TO CRIPPS?

—March 22

'You have only got to look at the pages of British imperial history to hide your head in shame.'

Who uttered these words? Mahatma Gandhi? Jawaharlal Nehru? De Valera? Lenin? Stalin? Subhas Bose? Hitler? Mussolini?

No. Your guess is wrong.

None of them said that, though, perhaps, any one of them could have. The man who denounced British imperial policy in these words is today in India on a British imperial mission. He is the son of a Lord, himself a knight of the British Empire and Lord Privy Seal of the British Government. Sir Stafford Cripps!

Like many other things in England, Sir Stafford Cripps presents a paradox. He is an aristocrat who wants to abolish the House of Lords, a fabulously wealthy man who is a confirmed Socialist, a renowned lawyer and King's Counsel who is always hob-nobbing with illegal political activities, even if he has never seen the inside of a prison.

His earnings as a lawyer were estimated at £30,000 a year. Once he declared, 'As a lawyer I meet the people of the ruling classes. They pay me fabulous and fantastic sums to get them out of their difficulties. I have no hesitation in saying that the working-class of this country are more capable of ruling than they are.'

He entered Parliament in 1931 as Labour member for East Bristol, which seat he has held since, and was Solicitor-General in the MacDonald Government. One of the extreme Leftists in the Labour Party, he advocated a United Front with the Communists, which was rejected by the Party conference in 1937. Again he started a new campaign in favour of an anti-Axis Popular Front which was to unite Labour, Liberals, Communists and dissident Conservatives. This led to his expulsion from the Labour Party in 1939.

An ardent champion of Anglo-Soviet collaboration, his political stock went up steeply when Russia was attacked by Germany.

Will his mission to India raise his political status still further—perhaps leading to Premiership—or will it prove a dismal flop?

COVERING CRIPPS

—April 12

Whatever else be the results and repercussions of the Cripps visit, he is leaving behind a host of Cripps legends and 'Crippstories' for journalists to write about for a long time to come.

Here are some of the random impressions gathered by the 'Chronicler', who happened to be in New Delhi during the last two crucial weeks.

The winter capital of India has been built on peculiar lines. The fabulously-paid European engineers and Indian contractors (who miraculously blossomed into millionaires overnight) combined to put up a town that is the nightmare of visitors and tourists. Nothing is where it should be.

For instance, where did you think Number Three, Queen Victoria Road, would be? Naturally you would say between Number Two and Number Four. But it isn't. Then, you might say, it should be on the other side of the road, approximately opposite Number Two. It is on the other side of the road; but it is practically a mile from Number Two and Number Four!

Add to this crazy town-planning the infuriating slowness of Delhi tongas, and you will know the reason why journalists arrived late at 'Cripppress' Conferences and sometimes did not arrive at all.

Once arrived at Number Three, Queen Victoria Road, you saw a solitary policeman perched on the boundary wall. The tonga has to be abandoned. But even policemen have learnt to hold the Fourth Estate in awe, and the magic word, 'Press', gets one past the sentry at the gate.

It is an ordinary bungalow, not much different from many residences of bureaucrats in New Delhi. There is the usual lawn, the usual portico, the usual verandah, and in the verandah the much-too-usual peons in the ornamental uniform reminiscent of Mughal days.

Neither in its architecture nor in its furniture and interior decoration is Number Three, Queen Victoria Road,

in any way distinguished. Everything is strong, solid, colourless, stereotyped.

But its lack of grandeur or elegance notwithstanding, this bungalow will go down in Indian history. It was here that Cripps lost—or saved?—India for the British Empire. It was here that Sir Stafford held those momentous talks that are likely to change the entire British-Indian relationship.

Number Three, Queen Victoria Road, has perhaps played an even more important part in the political development of India than Number One, Daryagunj, *Darussalam*, the famous residence of the late Dr Ansari, which was the headquarters of the Congress High Command during the Gandhi-Irwin negotiations.

So long as Dr Ansari was alive all important Congressmen always stayed there whenever they happened to be in Delhi. Walls, they say, have ears. If the walls of *Darussalam* could only speak, what wonderful stories they would have to tell—stories of the inner developments, the off-the-record debates, discussions and disputes of the leading political figures of India.

But, alas, Doctor Ansari is no more. And during the recent deliberations in Delhi the Congress 'Big Bosses' stayed at several different places. Some of them, including Gandhiji, stayed at Birla House in New Delhi where the meetings of the Working Committee were held. It is typically a millionaire's residence, even though its owner happens to be a Congress sympathizer and friend of Gandhiji. Luxuriously furnished, staffed with an army of Khaddar-uniformed servants, Birla House has everything—except a personality. A house acquires individuality and personality because of its resident. Anand Bhavan got its noble atmosphere from Motilal Nehru and *Darussalam* from Dr Ansari—both of them being cultured and refined aristocrats of a type that is getting rarer in India as elsewhere. Birla House is, well, Birla's house!

The Hindu Mahasabha leaders, by the way, held their confabulations in the Hindu Sabha Bhawan, their own permanent headquarters in New Delhi, which, I am told, has

been constructed out of donations from another of the Birlas. The House of Birlas is clearly not taking any chances !

The Muslim League Working Committee met at the residence of Nawabzada Liaqat Ali Khan, also in New Delhi. Thus the centre of political gravity seems to have definitely passed from Old to New Delhi. Only the Congress President, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, stayed in Old Delhi at the old Mughal style residence of Mr Asaf Ali in Daryagunj, in the neighbourhood of the house of the late Maulana Mohamed Ali and not far from *Darussalam*.

But to return to the Press Conferences. Most of these were held in Room 101, North Block, Imperial Secretariat, in truly bureaucratic surroundings.

Sir Stafford is generally punctual, but one day he hit a new high in punctuality by arriving ten minutes earlier than the time fixed. He generally wore a smile on his face as well as a flower in his button-hole. Also he wore his (by now) familiar features—a high intellectual forehead, keen eyes behind rimless glasses and yellowing teeth. These last are caused by the solitary vice Sir Stafford allows himself—smoking. But he is rather promiscuous in the enjoyment of his favourite weed. One day he appeared smoking a proletarian cigarette, on another day a cigar (which probably Churchill gave him with his blessings !) and on yet another day sucking at a pipe (which, perhaps, is a present from Stalin !). It is not known whether he is taking with him a *hookah* from India.

Much was made in the press of the deficiencies of the summer wardrobe of Sir Stafford when he arrived in India. At one of the Press Conferences, a journalist asked Sir Stafford whether he had considered the political and sartorial advantages of adopting *dhoti-kurta* during his stay in India. The Socialist Lord Privy Seal replied that he was using the same clothes that he had worn on his previous visit to India, and proudly displayed his khaddar trousers. (Evidently gestures like these were responsible for prejudicing the Muslim Leaguers against Sir Stafford before Mr Jinnah came out smiling with the charter of virtual Pakistan in his pocket.)

To be seen at these Press Conferences were about a dozen Government officials who sat there like C. I. D. reporters at Congress and Labour meetings.

Also visible (but not audible) were a dozen British and American journalists in impressive War Correspondent uniforms. They never asked any questions, and it is unlikely that they clearly followed the discussions. They occupied rear seats and kept quiet like back-benchers.

One of the Yankee news-hawks asked an Indian colleague, 'Say, brudder, I can't get the hang of this Congress "Mauslem" League tangle. What's the diff., anyway?' Retorted the Indian: 'Nor can I make head or tail of the Democrat-Republican tangle. Both words mean the same thing. What's the diff., anyway?'

Not altogether praiseworthy was the show put up by our own 'boys'. There was one, for instance, who always servilely addressed Sir Stafford as 'Your Honour'. Then there was the Indian representative of British Empire's favourite news-agency who always prefaced his remarks with long apologies ill befitting a journalist.

The palm for adaptability, however, goes to the journalist who appeared at the Cripps Press Conference at 9 a.m. in a suit and then changed into khaddar *dhoti-kurta* before going on to Birla House for the Congress Working Committee at 11 a.m. One almost expected him to borrow a fez and *sherwani* and proceed to Mr Jinnah's residence for an interview.

Some unimaginative—or, perhaps, over-imaginative!—bureaucrat had placed Sir Stafford's seat right in front of the largest window, so that as he stood to answer questions, he was silhouetted against the bright sky and the expression on his face could not be seen very clearly.

Right there in the background, however, was the Victory Arch of New Delhi, erected to commemorate the Allied success in the last War. Quite significant and symbolic! Or was it?

New Delhi

THE PEOPLE'S THEATRE IS BORN! *

—May 10

Six hundred mill workers rubbed shoulders with a hundred intellectuals, journalists and art critics—and even a few society ‘snobosseurs’—when the Indian People's Theatre Association staged a May Day show in a theatre in the mill area.

The occasion marked the inauguration of the People's Theatre movement in India—a movement to use histrionics for the entertainment, instruction and inspiration of the masses.

The movement, which originated in Russia, was tried in Spain, has been a thundering success in China and even managed to sneak into America through the New Deal Theatre Project, first made its appearance in India a year ago when a workers' theatre group was started in Bangalore. The response from the Bangalore workers was so enthusiastic that it was decided to extend the movement to all-India proportions.

In Bombay, we seem to remember, an abortive attempt had already been made to start such a movement. A group of intellectuals had met in the Taj Mahal Hotel, to discuss ‘ways and means’, but the proletarian theatre was apparently suffled in the air-conditioned atmosphere of the far-from-proletarian Taj!

Three months ago, however, the Indian People's Theatre Association was successfully launched and a Committee was formed to start work.

It was an odd spectrum—ranging from deepest Red to the bluest Blue blood!—the unifying factor being the desire to revitalize the Indian theatre and to use it as a medium of progressive thought.

Elected President was Lt.-Colonel S. S. Sokhey† (*alias* Colonel Moti, of Bromfield's *Night In Bombay*!) the Director of Haffkine Institute, who divides his study hours

*IPTA has since produced a number of successful plays. Its latest venture is a film entitled *Dharti-ke-Lal*, dealing with the Bengal famine (Producer K. A. Abbas).

† Since knighted.

between snakes, dance and Marxism. Mrs Wadia, the philanthropic socialite, became Vice-President, and Professor Daruwala the Treasurer; Joint Secretaries: Anil De Silva, Socialist daughter of a Ceylon Minister, and the well-known Marathi *litterateur*, Anant Kanekar. Among committee members were an art critic, a lawyer, a musician, a journalist, a publicist and representatives of students and workers.

That the diverse composition of the Committee was not a handicap but an asset is obvious from the record of work already done, over and above the brilliant show staged for the workers on May Day. Several new plays have been written and others have been translated into Hindustani as well as Marathi—songs have been specially composed for the Association, and contact has been established with several groups working on similar lines in other cities. A group of student-actors will shortly tour the villages of Maharashtra, staging progressive plays. With the co-operation of an architect, a portable stage has been designed to meet the requirements of the theatre groups on tour.

The May Day show has discovered for the regenerated Indian stage a promising playwright. We do not know if T. K. Sarmalkar, who wrote the play *Dada*, is himself a mill-worker, but he certainly knows proletarian life as perhaps no professional writer does. Out of the stuff of chawl life he drew out humour as well as pathos degeneration as well as glory, individual servility and collective strength. Topical allusions to Prohibition, War, Congress Ministries, Trade Union Movement, etc. were subtly introduced in dialogues and the play appropriately ended with a May Day speech explaining the significance of the present war.

GANDHIANA

—May 24

It was a privilege to have been present at Mahatma Gandhi's Press Conference last week. A rare privilege—because it was after over four years that Bombay newsmen were having such an opportunity.

It was not surprising, therefore, to find a big crowd of sixty—including news agency men, newspaper reporters, foreign correspondents, columnists and, representing the lowest species, mere 'Chronicler'.

The first thing that one notices about Gandhiji is his utter, impeccable ultra-cleanliness. He is not merely clean in a negative sense—the complete absence of a spot of dirt or dust on his clothes or his body, from the tip of his toes to the close-cropped grey crown of his head—but this cleanliness of his is a positive quality. It comes, partly, we believe, from a healthy condition of body and skin, but also from within, the cleanliness of the soul and mind manifesting itself through a clean body, a clean tongue clean gestures.

The Mahatma's features—thanks to photographers and cartoonists—are well known. Big ears, with pierced lobes, beaky nose, toothless mouth, thick lower lip, round steel-rimmed glasses, loin cloth of snow-white fine-woven khaddar, cheap pocket-watch dangling from the waist. But there seems to be a fairly general impression that he is ugly. Even some of his staunch admirers like to contrast his ungainly body with his beautiful soul.

But, actually, while he certainly is no Apollo, we found him far from being ugly. For one thing, his short and lean body, loin cloth, big ears and spectacles have been exaggerated so much by cartoonists and even by writers that he has acquired the reputation of a freak. For a man of seventy-odd years, he is very fit, indeed, his face shows little sign of strain, he has very few wrinkles and he has a general air of well-being which comes from a healthy and regular life, and from inner peace.

With a clean body, Gandhiji also possesses a clear mind. One may not agree with all his opinions—and few of our generation do—but no one can resist admiring the perfect clarity of his thought. Replying to the reporters' questions, he spoke in a very low voice—almost as if softly muttering to himself—and often there were pauses in the middle of his sentences, but not for once did he leave a sentence unfinished, not once did he have to revise a statement. Each sentence, each phrase each word, comes out of the mind slowly, well-weighed, chiselled and polished. The tongue, in his case, is but a faithful, obedient servant of the brain.

Then, what strikes one about the Mahatma is his disarming humility. When speaking he often looks down and looks away. He never raises his voice in argument or controversy. He never chastises, never boasts, never asserts his power.

One wishes, however, some of his personal staff had even half of the great man's humility. The language and tone in which photographers and cinematographers were 'told off' the premises would never have been approved by the Mahatma, however much he might dislike the cinema 'machines'. To serve a man of the eminence of Gandhiji is such a great privilege that it should induce humility rather than arrogance.

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A little Harijan boy walked up to the Mahatma through the hushed crowd at an evening prayer meeting, shouting, '*Mahatma Kothe Ahe?*' (Where is the Mahatma?) The Mahatma, of course, immediately took him by his side and patted him.

A well-known local film magazine, anxious to get the Mahatma's detailed views on films, has offered to subscribe a thousand rupees to any fund Gandhiji may name, if he will agree to answer a questionnaire submitted by this magazine.

Asked for an autograph (in return for the usual five rupees for the Harijan fund, of course) the Mahatma surprised his South Indian admirer by signing in Tamil.

Amidst the luxurious furnishings of Birla House, the loin-clothed Mahatma presented a study in contrast. He declined to sit on a sofa, preferring to squat on the ground along with the journalists—'to be the equal of you all'!

THE REDS ARRIVE

—August 9

Several months ago the word went round Bombay : "The Russians are here." Red Army soldiers, it was excitedly explained, had been seen in restaurants and walking about the Fort area. Their uniforms were simple, a yellowish sea-green, and their bearing was dignified. 'Look at them,' the Sovietophiles exclaimed, 'how different from other soldiers, how very majestic. . . . I mean, how very proletarian !'

Unemotionally (though not disinterestedly) the 'Chronicler' approached one of these 'Russians'.

'Hello, comrades, when did you leave Russia ?'

'Russia?'

'Yes. Russia—or, rather the Soviet Union. Aren't you from there?'

'No. We are Dutch.'

And that was the last we saw of any 'Russians' in Bombay until last week when we had an opportunity of meeting a party of them—men, women and children—on their way to Soviet Consulates in Africa, and a journalist and his wife *en route* for Australia.

The local Russophiles as well as the Russophobes will be surprised to hear that the Russian Consular party was staying at the very bourgeoisie Taj Mahal Hotel, they dressed for dinner, displayed perfect table manners, had no bombs or knives in the light luggage they carried (they had come most of the way by plane).

We had a better opportunity of coming into contact with the Russian journalist and his very charming wife. Vladimir Mikheyev and Klaudia Mikheyeva are as remote from the once-popular conception of the 'bearded and blood-thirsty Bolsheviks' as it is possible to imagine. Vladimir, who is 35 and worked as a compositor in a press before he got promoted to reporting, is a clean-cut, clean-shaven, smart young man, and speaks English with a continental accent, while anyone would mistake blonde and rather fragile Klaudia for an American college girl straight from the campus. She does not use make-up and is generally simply dressed in a printed

cotton frock, but she bears no resemblance to the austere and fanatical Ninotchka of the movies.

Indeed, the impression one gets of the couple is that of average, happily married, intelligent young people who enjoy music and are sport enough to sample Indian food—and enjoy it. There is not the slightest trace of fanaticism in them—not even of unnecessary ideological fervour. They carry themselves with the self-confidence of those who have secured their freedom and are completely satisfied with their way of life.

But, mention the war, and there is a quiet transformation. One notices a sudden tension of the muscles, a faraway look in the eyes, a twitching of the hands as if eager to grip a rifle. They are not overtly demonstrative, but their determination is unmistakable. The Vladimirs and Klaudias will never, never yield to Hitler!

We had an informal lunch with the Mikheys at a friend's place followed by a highbrow musical afternoon. The Russians had brought their records—they left behind part of their clothes to be able to carry in the plane this load of music—and we played them all.

It was a thrilling experience—the music and the reaction on the Mikheys.

As record after record was played, representative of the variety of cultures and languages in the Soviet Union, the two Soviet citizens seemed to be back in their own proletarian homeland. The corn was high and ripe on the banks of the Don, waving in the Caucasian breeze. Leningrad was aglow with the Arctic night. The boats floated down the Volga as the boatmen sang to the accompaniment of the music of the oars. The gypsies danced a whirlwind dance and a Georgian woman declared that she still loved her man, even if he had jilted her. There was children's laughter in the Gorky Park. The domes and minarets of Moscow held their heads high and proud as the cobblestones rang with the determined tramp-tramp-tramp of the Red Army marching out to battle. And, suddenly, the sky was overcast with evil clouds and the drone of the *Luftwaffe* was heard. The peasant in the field, the worker in the factory, the Gypsy dancer, the Georgian woman, the children in the park—they all heard it. The dance and the song came to an abrupt

end, the children were hushed into silence, the tractors became tanks and the factory-worker gripped his Red Army rifle—the blond Russians, the dark gypsies, the Azerbaijanians and the Turkmanians, the nomads and the metropolitan intellectuals, the men and women of the Soviet Union, rose to meet the enemy.

All this was in that music—and more !—for the music of the Soviet Union is the music of the people, expressing in terms of symphony and rhythm their life with all its joys and sorrows, hopes and fears. And these two Soviet citizens sat in a room in Bombay filled with a nostalgic yearning for home—the home that is more than home for them and millions like them—and one could see them sending their thoughts to their comrades in fields and factories and the battlefronts of that far-flung empire—the world's first empire of the workers and the toilers !

URDU, HINDI, HINDUSTANI !

—August 16

The proceedings of the A. I. C. C., among other things demonstrated the lingual unity of India that has been achieved by the Congress. It is but one phase of the Indian nationalism that has emerged out of the storm and stress of political agitation in India. How we wished some of the imperialist propagandists who are never tired of talking about the 'hundreds of languages, races and religions of India' were present at Gowalia Tank to hear the speeches being delivered in the national language—Hindustani !

The 'Chronicler', who has a *penchant* for linguistics, took note of certain words used by the various speakers—clearly demonstrating that the notion that Urdu is the language of the Muslims and Hindi of the Hindus is entirely wrong.

Here are, for instance, some of the Urdu words used by Gandhi—a Hindu and a Gujarati—in the course of his speech.

Ta'ajjub (Wonder)
Sadma (Grief)
Kaffarah (Penance)
Behtar (Better)
Deen (Religion)
Besh (More)
Masalah (Material)
Maqah (Opportunity)
Taqat (Power)
Hidayeten (Instructions)
Shuru (Begin)
Etebar (Trust)
Hazam (Digest)
Shakhs (Person)
Aman (Peace)
Imtihan (Test)
Adab (Respect)
Da'wa (Claim)

And for contrast, here are some of the Hindi words that were used by Dr Mohamed Ashraf.

Andolan (Struggle)
Junta (People)
Eka (Unity)
Shakti (Power)
Desh (Country)
Raksha (Help)
Atam Hatya (Suicide)
Vidyarthi (Student)
Kranti (Revolution)
Prabhao (Grandeur)

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who speaks chaste Urdu, began his speech with 'Janab-e-Sadar aur baradaran-e-watan'—a phrase that would be easily understood in Iran! On the other hand, Dr. Ashraf addressed the President as *Sabhapati*. Acharya Narendra Deo spoke better Urdu than Mr Jinnah or any other Gujarati Muslim can ever hope to speak.

Which all proves—doesn't it?—that

(1) The Urdu-Hindi business has nothing whatever to do with communal distinctions, and

(2) It is by a judicious combination of the Urdu and Hindi vocabularies that we can hope further to evolve Hindustani—our national language.

NEHRU ON 'TIME' COVER

—August 23

On Friday morning, two days ago, in a million American homes the postman dropped through the slit in the door a copy of *Time* newsmagazine. This happens every week. But this time, as Mrs Average American heard the dull plop went to the door to pick up the magazine and tore the wrapper, she looked into the handsome face of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

This fact, in its far-reaching implications, is important for India, important for America, possibly for the whole world. The cover page of *Time* Magazine has come to be regarded as the focal point of American public opinion and when it bears a man's photograph, it means that the man is, for that week, the centre of nation-wide attention. Nehru is the first Indian to have secured this place, which only confirms that at last America is becoming India-conscious. It is symbolic of the world-wide attention the Congress by launching the 'Quit India' struggle, has succeeded in capturing for itself, its leaders and its movement.

The *Time* cover-page photograph is always an index to the big 'story' of the week and one can presume there will be a lot about Jawaharlal and his ideas in this issue. Already, we learn, as many as two full pages were devoted to the Indian scene in last Friday's issue of *Time*.

Three times during the last six months has India supplied the cover-page 'story' to *Time*—Lord Linlithgow, Sir Stafford Cripps and General Brereton (Commander of the United States Air Force in India). But in point of importance this week's 'story' beats them all.

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Ten months ago 43-year-old Editor Luce swung on his revolving chair and faced the world map on the wall. His eye took in the different frontiers and the frontiers that were no more. Had he got the world's newsfronts adequately covered? Yes, he had. Even though his Bureaus in Berlin, Paris and Rome had had to be closed, yet he had his men in England, in the Soviet Union, in China, in Turkey, in the Middle East, in Switzerland, in the Philippines—each sending in first-rate stuff from his vantage point. But—Editor Luce's shrewd eyes swept westwards from the Philippines—what about India? True, some of his men had snooped around the country on casual flying visits, but suppose India suddenly leapt into the headlines? Suppose, Japan went to war with the U.S.A., the American frontier would be on the Ganges, and no mistake about it. It would be too bad if *Time* were unable to give adequate coverage on the possible developments in India. And Editor Luce, who spends nearly a thousand dollars a day on his foreign cable service and whose newshawks never use a train when they can get an aeroplane, is not the one to take chances, nor to waste time.

Already the advance guard of Luce's organization was in India—in the form of the immaculate Maurice Lancaster and Bob ('Kid From Spain') Navarro to 'shoot' India for the *March of Time*.

Soon followed William Fisher, one of the best and smartest fishers of news on the *Time-Life* roster, who had already distinguished himself during exciting years in the Far East. Bill Fisher set up office in Delhi, but he was not content to pick up communiques from the Government Information Bureau. Soon he got into touch with the leaders of public opinion in India. One of his earliest 'scoops' was to get a 5,000-word article from Pandit Jawaharlal

* Died in America in 1944 in tragic circumstances, while swimming in the sea

Nehru and cable it to New York, where it appeared in *Fortune*. Apart from this 'scoop' he has cabled nearly 50,000 words on India during the nine months he has been in this country. Someone with a flair for arithmetic might try to calculate the cost!

Shortish for an American, pleasant-mannered and informal, conscientious and painstaking, 35-year-old Bill Fisher represents the best type of American foreign correspondent—neither a sensation-monger nor a cynic. His mild looks ill fit the War Correspondent's uniform he has to wear. In the course of his travels he is in the habit of losing his things including (he confesses) his heart. A foreign correspondent, one gathers, is in some ways like a sailor—with the important difference that the affairs of his heart are not restricted to ports!

He enjoyed sending over a dozen cables to his office covering every conceivable angle on Nehru because he is very anxious that the Indian nationalist viewpoint, as represented by Jawaharlal, should be conveyed to the maximum number of Americans. Indeed, for Jawaharlal he has come to have a soft corner in his heart. (Yes the same vagrant heart which is liable to be lost so very frequently!) He considers Nehru to be one of the greatest living democrats of the world and Azad one of the world's finest orators. But he also admires Rajagopalachari's courage of convictions, is simply fascinated by 'Madame Naidu' and has become a personal friend of Dr Syed Mahmud.

One may hope, therefore, that through him the million readers of *Time* magazine are getting a balanced and accurate picture of India and not the series of distorted snapshots we are used to finding in American papers.

HELLO, BOYS!

—August 23

There are quite a number of foreign correspondents in Bombay these days. They came from Delhi for the A.I.C.C., and have 'stayed for dinner' ever since. The 'Chronicle' has had only a distant glimpse of the British crowd, but the Americans are quite an interesting bunch, though none of them looks like his Hollywood counterpart we are used to seeing on the screen.

There is, for instance, the tall and lanky Steele, of the *Chicago Daily News* (another Gunther in the making?) who possesses a powerfully hooked nose—for news! According to one of his colleagues, he is one of the six best American foreign correspondents—distinguished even among the galaxy of distinguished writers on the *Chicago Daily News* payroll. One could see him going about the local 'storm centres' arguing with over-zealous schoolboys on the ethics of keeping your head under your hat. He is an expert on the Far East and has travelled extensively in China, and came to India two months ago from the Russian front. After having had to depend upon an interpreter twenty-four hours of the day in Moscow, he finds working in India simply child's play because here (to his evident amazement) everyone he meets knows English. Chaplin, of the International News Service, is as tall as Steele, has thin sandy hair and, with his uniform, wears the look of a rather weather-beaten soldier, acquired perhaps through the wear-and-tear of a foreign correspondent's strenuous life. One would like to hear him talk about his Abyssinian adventures, but all these days he has been too busy to talk. Grover, of the Associated Press, on the other hand, looks fresh and shy like a junior professor of psychology from Vassar College, and you would never guess he had twice been torpedoed in the Mediterranean.

We don't know what sort of deal these 'boys' have been getting from the local Censor. But, for their benefit, we don't mind repeating an experience which that Dean o

foreign correspondents, the late Webb Miller, had in Bombay during the last civil disobedience movement.

One day, after witnessing a more than normally severe police lathi charge on Congress volunteers, Miller 'filed' at the telegraph office a long story in which he graphically described what he had seen at the Azad Maidan. Feeling confident that the cables were sizzling with his red-hot stuff, he returned to his hotel. There he was handed an anonymous note informing him that his cable had been withheld by the censors and that he had better do something about it if he wanted his 'story' to get through. So Miller got up and went to the Censor and was surprised to find that the information in the anonymous note was absolutely correct. His cable was still lying on the Censor's table. What did Miller do? Argue with the Censor? Tone down his story? Appeal to the Consulate? Nothing. He merely told the Censor that he was immediately chartering an aeroplane to fly to Iran, from where he would not only send that cable, but also add a few lines about the Censorship.

Within a couple of hours, Miller's cable was on its way to America without a single word scratched or altered.

'QUIT INDIA !

—August 30

First Edition—published on August 8. Three thousand copies sold out in six days.

Second Edition—published on August 15. More than 500 copies sold out in one day. Entire second edition of 3,000 copies nearly exhausted by the end of the second week.

Third Edition—now in the press.

Translations in Indian languages under preparation.

This, in brief, is the amazing reception a little book costing eight annas has had. Even, according to the standards of Europe and America, it has proved overnight a

best seller. In India, where any book which sells a thousand copies in the course of a year is deemed a success, it is phenomenal, almost unbelievable.

Unless, of course, you know that the author of this little book is a little man called Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The title of the book is *Quit India*.

Quit India is a collection of brief passages from the writings and speeches of Mahatma Gandhi (from 1915 to 1942) bearing on the Indo-British problem. Read in their chronological sequence, these passages provide an interesting study in the evolution of Indian politics as summed up in and symbolized by Mahatma Gandhi. They clearly show the gradual step-by-step disillusionment and consequent transformation of India's greatest leader—from 1915, when, on his return from South Africa, he still prided himself on his being 'a loyal citizen of the Empire' to the present day, when at last he is compelled to declare himself an 'open rebel' against the system which holds his country in thralldom; from the Congress session when he opposed the resolution demanding Complete Independence and severance of the British connexion and was content with Dominion Status within the British Empire, to June, 1942, when he was forced to declare, 'I want unadulterated independence . . . British authority should end completely.'

It is to be noted, however, that even the 'loyalist' Gandhi of World War I was not unconscious of the possibility of Indo-British relations being strained to breaking point. As early as 1916, at the opening ceremony of Benares University, he declared:

'If I found it necessary for the salvation of India that the English should retire I would not hesitate to declare that they would have to go, and I hope I would be prepared to die in defence of that belief.'

Quit India is at once a study of a personality and the history of an epoch dominated by that personality. Added to it is its undoubted topicality—the publication date synchronized with the most momentous session of the A.I.C.C.

It is a book that ought to be read and pondered not only by every Indian but also every Briton, and any such Americans or nationals of the other Allied countries who wish to understand the Indian situation.

The publishers and, more particularly, the editors of the volume, deserve congratulations on the 'scoop' they have scored by bringing out this book at this particular moment.

But behind this sensational 'scoop' lie many years of patient, painstaking labour which needs to be mentioned.

During the last 30 years Mahatma Gandhi has written more than any other prominent world figure except perhaps historian Churchill—more than Roosevelt or columnist Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt, more than Author Hitler or ex-journalist Mussolini, and infinitely more than the silent Marshal Chiang Kai-shek.

He must have written more than 2,000,000 words and if he had syndicated his weekly articles, by now he would have made at least a million rupees—or, perhaps, even a million pounds. But then the 'Born Bania' has never set a price on his written word and week after week, the little advertisement-free *Harijan* (which is a continuation of his previous paper, *Young India*) has supplied free columns to hundreds of papers in India and abroad—the only paper of its kind in the world.

Add to this tremendous literary output the thousands of speeches he has delivered and the numerous interviews he has given. Consider, further, the infinite variety of subjects covered by the world's strangest journalist—from religion to nutrition, from politics to platonic love, from social reform to the cinema, from the evils of drink to the virtues of unpolished rice, from Fascism to birth control!

Quit India is thus only a fragment—a sample, as it were—of the encyclopaedic work that is still awaiting publication.

But, as we have already pointed out, the little book has a significance of its own. Indeed, we are tempted to express ~~a might-have-been~~. If it had been published a little earlier, ~~and made available~~ to the men of New Delhi and Whitehall, as well as the leaders of the United Nations in Washington, Kubyshev and Chungking, the history of the last three weeks in India might have been differently written

LENIN SMILES !

—September

On the wall are four flags arranged in ladder-like formation—the national Tri-colour of India, the Red Flag of the Soviet Union, the White-Star-on-Blue of China and the White-Crescent-on-Green of Pakistan—we mean, the Muslim League !

From the adjacent wall three faces keep a vigilant eye on the goings-on in the room: those of Lenin, Stalin and Marshal Timoshenko.

The remaining walls are plastered with maps—of China, the Soviet Union, Europe, India. There is barely room enough left for one extra map—of Pakistan, one presumes!—whenever that is available.

There are two tables strewn with fairly orderly journalistic paraphernalia. A few chairs for visitors and a narrow couch-bed with a pair of rather unproletarian Japanese silk cushions. That is all.

But there are other rooms in which you may observe a staff of a dozen sub-editors, two typists, clerks, a radio-set, a small library of Marxist books.

This is the office of the editor of a weekly paper, *People's War*—and its three editions in Hindi, Urdu and Marathi. But its importance goes beyond journalistic horizons. It is the headquarters of the Communist Party of India.

A year ago, if the Police had managed to locate these premises one would have heard of 'Red Den Discovered in City'. Today it is a respectable place, carrying on respectable journalistic and political activities. There is a telephone at hand, and telegraph peons may be seen arriving with press cables from London. And passers-by along the Khetwadi Main Road in Girgaum may observe a Red Flag dangling from the third-floor window.

Today the Communist Party is legal and its activities may be carried on in broad daylight. This is one of the many contradictions implicit in the present situation—

ex-ministers in jail, ex-conspirators free; bourgeois papers have to close down, while Communist papers flourish and are sold openly, even to British 'Tommies'; the revolutionaries of yesterday with a price on their heads are the war-effort-wallahs of today, flattered by the authorities.

These contradictions bespeak no *volte face* on the part of the Communists, no betrayal of the masses or 'sell-out' to the Imperialists, but they are the product of the present war, which itself is the greatest contradiction, as witness the impossible alignments it has produced—Churchill and Stalin, Chiang and Chu-Teh, Roosevelt and Earl Browder, Rajagopalachariar and Puran Chandra Joshi!

To Puran Chandra Joshi, Secretary of the Communist Party of India, these contradictions are no contradictions at all. Kumaon-born, pleasant-featured, shortish, quick-spoken, deeply read in Marxist ideology, tea-addict P. C. Joshi—'P.C.' to all his comrades—is one of the most interesting and important personalities in Indian politics today. In spite of the fact that he has spent long years in jail and at other times has had to live 'underground', he has managed to preserve a youthful appearance and youthful enthusiasm to match. His Marxist fanaticism is not offensive: on the contrary, it compels admiration.

He is the spokesman and chosen leader of the Indian Communists and, therefore, to him we went to get some light on the present puzzling attitude of the Indian Communists and also, since the party is, for the first time, legal today, some information about the Communist Party, its composition, constitution and membership.

Mainly because it has always been illegal, never before has the Indian press published these authentic details about a party which has been so much talked about, applauded, criticized, condemned, abused and some of whose members, are individually so well known. It was left to the LAST PAGE to be the first to break this black-out.

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The Communist ideology took seed in India much before the Communist Party of India was formed. According to Joshi, the success of the Bolshevik Revolution had a tremendous impact upon radically-minded Indians. This manifested itself in three different ways as early as 1920

1. Some of the *Muhajireen*—old Khilafatist workers who left India after the collapse of the Khilafat movement—managed to reach Asiatic Soviet Russia, *via* Afghanistan, and thus imbibed the Bolshevik doctrines.

2. Political workers turned their attention to organizing Trade Unions while intellectuals formed study circles to study Marxism.

3. Within the Congress, a Socialistic element made its appearance.

Local Communist groups were being formed when, in 1924, the Government launched the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case. The charge was 'Trying to organize the Communist Party with a view to overthrowing His Majesty's Government. The accused included Dange and Muzaffar, and M. N. Roy as an absconder (who was later to rise high in the International Communist hierarchy and still later to be expelled from the Comintern!). The leaders on trial were sentenced, but it gave them an opportunity to propagate their views and the Labour movement got a great fillip all over the country. There were several successful strikes, Socialist study circles were formed everywhere and in 1926 the Nehrus (Motilal and Jawaharlal) went to Moscow to attend the tenth anniversary of the Revolution—evidence of the Indian nationalists' interest in the Soviet

The biggest boost that the Indian Communists got was in 1929 when 32 of them (including two English Communists, Spratt and Bradley) were put on trial on a charge of conspiracy. The Meerut Conspiracy Case went on for four and a half years and cost the Government an astronomical figure—Joshi calculates the expense to have been Rs. 8,000 per day of the trial. The Government lawyers alone were paid something like Rs. 2,000 per day! Shrewd propagandists as they were, the Communists utilized the trial for their own ends, and day after day the Indian papers carried columns of their statements made in Court which were nothing but a reiteration of the Communist ideology and programme. Not only in India but all over the world echoed the voice of the Indian Communists. The Meerut Case put Indian Communism on the world map!

Joshi is proud of his 'boys' who have never missed a

single opportunity to propagate Communism. Whenever they have been jailed, they have held regular study classes in Marxism in the prison itself and thus won over a mass of non-Communist radicals, for example, the terrorist prisoners in the Andamans who came back from the penal colony full-fledged Communists.

We asked Joshi if it was true that for two months after the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, his party continued to call this an Imperialist war from which Indians should keep aloof. He admitted it, explaining that they took time fully to understand, discuss and clarify the world situation—a task which was rendered difficult by some members being in jail and others ‘underground’. It was only after careful deliberations that they decided to raise the ‘People’s War’ slogan.

He repudiated the suggestion, however, that they had received instructions either from the Comintern headquarters in Moscow or from the British Communist Party. ‘The Communist Party of India,’ he said, ‘is a much more important and influential body than the Communist Party of Great Britain,’ adding that as early as 1934 the Comintern had declared that no instructions would be issued to the parties in various countries, which were to determine their policies according to their own circumstances.

Pakistan, admitted Joshi, is not the same thing as the self-determination of nationalities patterned on the Soviet model which the Communists have advocated. Contrary to popular expectations, he or his colleagues have not yet met Mr Jinnah to discuss the Congress-League unity scheme they have so vehemently espoused. But it appears that they are in touch with ‘certain prominent Muslim Leaguers’, and Joshi thinks more and more Leaguers are veering round to the idea of Unity.

On the issue of ‘Quit India’, said Joshi, the Communists are hundred per cent. with the Congress. Imperialism must end in India and a National Government immediately formed to mobilize the people against the Fascist invaders. But, he insists, the present struggle is unnecessary. The Communist view is: Establish unity and you get the National Government without the necessity of a struggle. Sounds like Amery stuff to us!

A very distinguished Right wing Congress leader once said: 'I hate Communism. But I must confess that the Communists are the sincerest and most serious and selfless political workers in India.'

To this we may add that, with all our differences with the Communists, we feel that Communism—or to be more precise, Marxism—has made a distinct contribution to the development of the Indian National movement. Nehru's radicalism. The Congress Socialist Party. Resolution on Fundamental Rights. Trade Unions. Strikes. Kisan Sabhas. A new rational outlook on social problems. The realistic trend in Indian literature. The growing divorce between politics and mystical nationalism. The declining influence of orthodoxy, priestcraft and organized religion. The undisputed idea that Indian independence must mean economic betterment of the masses and not merely replacement of White bureaucrats by Brown bureaucrats. Anti-Fascism. All these can be traced back to the doctrine of the economic interpretation of history formulated by Marx, practised by Lenin and propagated by the pioneers of Communism in India.

The present isolation of the Communist Party from the main current of the national movement may seriously damage their future as a party. Nor can we see much scope in India for a rigid adherence to the Stalinist line of the Comintern. But the Communistic influence shall endure. And isn't that what really matters?

As we bade good-bye to Comrade Joshi and looked up at the wall above him, we could distinctly see Lenin smiling, even if there was a slight frown on the serious brow of Stalin.

THE VOICE

—October 11

Somewhere in Spain, 1937.

Two armies, entrenched, face each other across a narrow strip of No-Man's-Land—the Loyal Republicans and Franco's Rebel Fascists.

Both armies are international in their composition. Besides the landowners and the professional military officers, Franco is depending upon the well-equipped Germans and Italians sent by the Fuehrer and the Duce to stage a small rehearsal in Spain for the bigger drama they are planning to stage all over Europe, all over the world.

On the other side, the ill-equipped army of Spanish workers and peasants also has a foreign element in it—the International Brigade, to which have come young idealists, democrats, dreamers, poets and writers and philosophers from all over the world, to fight for democracy on the sunny plains of Spain. There is a small medical mission even from distant India and the Brigade is expecting a visit from the Indian leader, Nehru.

The two armies face each other, and across No-Man's-Land fly bullets and shells. There is the constant chatter of machine-guns, and every now and then a screaming German bomb lands with a crash to scar the good earth of Spain.

And then, as the glowing red ball of the sun slowly sinks down behind the low-lying hills which are now silhouetted inky black against the colourful pageant of the sunset clouds, comes a voice—a deep, rich voice, a man's voice, a voice singing a song. A Spanish folk song.

It is a voice in a million, a voice familiar with man's great passions, now rising in a crescendo of joy, now murmuring the secrets of sorrow and separation. Like a leaping cataract the words flow off this unknown tongue and into the Spanish hearts on either side of No-Man's-Land.

Fingers slip off deadly triggers, the gunners forget their guns, the snipers lose sight of their targets, the song of death is stilled by the songs of life—songs of life and love,

of the rich soil of Spain, of the gallant Caballeros and the comely dark Senoritas, of the gay Fiestas and the exciting bull-fights. The two armies forget to fight. The Muse has conquered Mars.

This was the voice of Paul Robeson, the American Negro singer, actor, humanitarian and democrat, who had come to greet his comrades of the International Brigade, to entertain the war-weary army of the Spanish people with his songs.

The incident—one of the many happy legends of the tragic Spanish civil war—brings out both aspects of Paul's great personality, the almost magical quality of his voice, and his deep-rooted sympathy for the people—the people of all races and all lands.

One-time champion boxer who was educated for a career at the Bar and later turned singer, Paul Robeson broke the barriers of race and colour that still surround a Negro in America both by the sheer force of his sledge-hammer fists and the magic of his voice. He rose to the highest peaks of fame and fortune, earning millions on the stage and the screen. But a sensitive soul like his could not be content with personal triumphs. He saw around him millions of his race and his colour suffering indignities and insults, being kicked and abused by some, and what is infinitely worse, 'patronized' and 'encouraged' by others who treated them as if they were lepers in need of 'Christian' charity!

His soul revolted against this tyranny of the Whites over the Blacks and his first reaction was a desire to retire to Africa, the original homeland of the Negroes, and there to organize his people on their own distinctive cultural lines. He wanted them to develop in their own way, not slavishly imitating the Whites, for he had great admiration for the old primitive civilizations that existed in many parts of Africa for hundreds of years.

Then he went on a tour of the Soviet Union and that visit changed the whole plan of his life. He found that at last there was one country where a Negro could feel, and was treated, as a human being, where equal opportunities existed for all, irrespective of their race or colour. As one of the world's greatest artistes, he was welcomed and acclaimed wherever he went. He was given the star part in one of the

greatest Russian operas, *Boris Godunov*. He began to study Socialism and Communism and his perspective changed. He realized that the Colour Bar was as much an economic as a racial question and that the degradation of the Negro race had a lot to do with imperialist ambitions and capitalistic greed. He was so impressed with the Soviet Union that he left his son to be educated there.

Since then, Paul Robeson the 'successful' Negro singer is no more. Instead, he is today a campaigner for social justice. No longer is he concerned with the future of his own race, for he knows that the future of the Negroes is linked with the elimination of Imperialism, Capitalism and Fascism. For this ideal he has sacrificed a rich career, preferring to sing free for unemployed miners rather than accept a million-dollar stage or film contract to entertain the idle rich. He has repeatedly spurned fabulous offers from film producers, and last week issued a statement from San Francisco, declaring that he is 'through with Hollywood until movie magnates see some other way to portray Negroes than as the customary plantation Hallelujah shouters'.

This strong protest, we are sure, he has lodged not only on behalf of Negroes but all coloured peoples, including Indians, who are invariably represented as uncivilized freaks in Hollywood films.

Paul Robeson is a staunch friend of India and counts many Indians, including Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, among his personal friends. Once he paid a striking tribute to India by appearing at an Indian Independence Day Rally in London and singing the *Vande Mataram* song. It was typical of Paul Robeson to identify himself with the cause of Indian freedom by singing a national song of India.

WHERE, OH, WHERE?

—November 1

The snakes of India are definitely not playing the game. Only one case of snake-bite is reported among American troops in India. It was a non-poisonous snake and there was no fatality.

Gen. Clayton Bissell mentioned this in giving a 'health report' of the U. S. troops at a Press Conference.

Now this bit of news, no doubt, will be read with feelings of the utmost joy and thankfulness in Cincinnati and Buffalo, Poughkeepsie and Pasadena, wherever parents, relations and friends of the Doughboys happen to be.

But, at the same time, the reassuring news will cause some disappointment, disillusionment, perhaps even a sense of having been cheated. For all these years Americans have been hearing and reading of India as a land full of snakes—wriggling, crawling, creeping snakes of all colours and forms, cobras, pythons, flying snakes, water snakes, desert snakes, rattle-snakes.

And when these honest Yanks actually arrive in India armed with snake-bite cures and long boots, veritably challenging, 'Come on, India, bring out all your snakes,' what do they find? One miserable little snake—that too a vegetarian, grass-eating, non-poisonous conscientious objector. This, certainly, is not cricket—much less is it baseball!

We are afraid the Yankees now in India are going to meet with many such disappointments. Where, for instance, are those *fakirs* who can perform the rope-trick? How is it one can't see a single turban like the one Ramon Novarro wore in *Son of India* and Tyrone Power in *The Rains Came*? Where are all the taxi-elephants? Where are the Thugs? Where are the servile, cringing Indians like Gunga Din? Where is the river near Bombay where Clark Gable jumped on board a freight ship in *They Met in Bombay*? Where are the benevolent *Sahibs* and the beautiful *Memsahibs*? Which is the way to Shangri-la? In short, where is the glamorous India, the mysterious Orient, that one has seen in Hollywood films?

Not only about snakes but about many other things, our American guests in India will find it necessary to change their opinion during their stay. And we don't think they will be the losers if they leave behind some of their old notions and prejudices about India and Indians and take back instead a real understanding of the country and the people.

CHARITY AND EXPLOITATION

—November 15

Every now and then enthusiastic and kind-hearted members of Bombay 'Society' make up their minds to organize a charity show. The cause to which they donate the proceeds is generally worth while and no doubt some suffering is alleviated, to whatever small extent.

Last year Mr Karaka organized 'The Night of November 6' at the Taj in aid of ex-servicemen. This year we are shortly going to have three such shows—Mrs. Tara Ali Baig's *Hamara Hindustan* in aid of Civil Defence workers and other charities, Mrs Walter's 'Let's Face It' for some charities connected with the war effort, and Blitz Karanjia's 'Tonight at 8' in aid of a rehabilitation scheme for disabled soldiers.

The purpose for which the money is to be collected is, in every case, a very laudable one. The organizers are, doubtless, motivated by nothing but the desire to help the needy, relieve suffering and render humanitarian service. But while they relieve suffering to some slight extent, they help to bolster up and strengthen the system that is at the root of such suffering.

Charity is the inevitable complement of exploitation. There would be no beggars if there were no millionaires!

If such shows 'appease' the disturbed conscience of our plutocrats and well-to-do classes, they do a distinct disservice. A ten-rupee ticket bought for a charity show—and then one

can turn with equanimity to one's business of exploitation. With one hand give a donation of a hundred rupees for 'homeless and destitute children', with the other draw handsome dividends through a system of exploitation of cheap labour which produces these homeless and destitute children! It is a convenient and satisfactory arrangement.

This system of charity shows was invented by the lazy, do-nothing wives of English landowners and capitalists in an attempt to reconcile the Christian ethics they heard preached in the church on Sundays and the un-Christian exploitation they practised in real life the other six days of the week. Like rouge and lip-stick, cocktails, ball-room dancing and bridge parties, it has been imported into India and grafted on to our already complicated system of social snobbery and the attitude of patronizing benevolence to the poor that goes with it.

To sensitive minds there is something cruelly incongruous in a parade of wealth—gold-border saris, jewels, limousines, expensive clothes, cocktails, champagne—at functions organized to help the poor and the destitute.

How many of those who attend these shows are really concerned with the plight of the homeless, the disabled or the wounded? How many buy a ticket only to oblige an influential person, to show off one's latest sari, to be seen among the 'right' people, to catch the eye of the Governor or to dance a Rhumba or a Conga?

So long as the present economic system lasts, such 'Charity' shows will continue to be organized and justified by many on the ground that they provide relief to a number of needy persons. But it is well to realize their true social function.

LIES UNLIMITED

—November 29

Britain's lie-factory seems to be working overtime these days to discredit India and Indian leaders, and one bitterly wonders if this activity also is a part of the programme of war production.

It is the same factory that once manufactured the 'Zinoviev Letter' to break the General Strike in England, and for several years produced a series of anti-Soviet reports 'From Our Riga Correspondent'—Riga, of course, being a back-room in Fleet Street and the correspondent being a discredited gutter scribe forced to earn a living by 'cooking' Bolshevik atrocities out of his unscrupulous mind!

But no longer need British Presslords order their mercenary employees to invent stories of 'Red' barbarism. The Soviet Union is an ally of Britain and is helping to keep the menace of Hitler from British shores. The lie-factory, therefore, has been adapted to manufacture lies about India and Indian leaders. It is a wartime job and everyone is helping in the good work—reporters, sub-editors, feature writers, cartoonists and columnists.

A few of the British papers which reached India last week provide a fair sample of the product of this lie-factory—Lies Unlimited!

Lie Number One:—Take a look at the *Daily Sketch* issue dated August 5. There is a five-column headline running right across the front-page, shrieking a lie to its million readers: **GANDHI'S INDIA-JAP PEACE PLAN EXPOSED.**

To give colour to the story there is a picture of Mira Ben (Miss Slade) in the bottom left corner with the headline in big black type: **ENGLISH WOMAN GANDHI'S JAP PEACE ENVOY.**

The 'Gandhi India-Jap Peace Plan' which the *Daily Sketch* has 'exposed' is nothing more than a garbled report of the unauthorized minutes of a meeting of the Congress Working Committee that the Government seized in a raid on the Congress office at Allahabad and published on the eve of the A.I.C.C. meeting in Bombay. The exposure failed to

impress anyone in India and ultimately recoiled on the Government's own head by demonstrating to the public how the utterly untenable position of the Government has to be bolstered up by such stunts.

Indeed, it was made clear both by Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal that there was not the slightest intention to do anything that would injure the cause of the United Nations, especially China and the Soviet Union. If Gandhiji projected the possibility of going to Japan it was the gesture of a great soul, a daring mission of the Spirit to convert those who have steeled their hearts and closed their minds. It might be futile. But to talk of it as the action of a traitor is a LIE. A deliberate, dastardly LIE.

Lie Number Two:— In the same issue the *Sketch* reports

'Much jeering and booing of Europeans and Americans occurred in some areas, and there were shouts of "Quit India", "Boycott British Goods" and "Boycott Americans".'

'Boycott Americans!' How very convenient for trans-Atlantic consumption! But, as it happens, I went round the city during those very days along with two American correspondents who can substantiate my statement that not once were Americans jeered at, not once was the slogan 'Boycott Americans' raised by any one.

It is just a lie—though a minor lie, compared with others manufactured in Britain's lie-factory.

Lie Number Three:—Talking to a friend only a week ago, I said, 'I hate British Imperialism, but there is one British institution which I would not like to see destroyed—*Punch*.' 'Indeed,' I added, 'I would much rather be stranded on a desert island with a copy of *Punch* than with any other weekly paper in the world—*New Masses*, *People's War*, *Illustrated Weekly* or even the *Bombay Chronicle Weekly*!'

But I must now revise my opinion. The mellow humour of *Punch* which I have read and chuckled over for nearly 15 years is now being used as a cloak for anti-Indian lies. Lies drawn in cartoons.

The first one, drawn by Sir Bernard Partridge, famous cartoonist, bears the caption 'The Quisling Touch', and shows Mahatma Gandhi shaking hands with Quisling, the Norwegian traitor. In Quisling's pocket there is a letter addressed to 'Dear Adolf'; in Gandhiji's hand a letter

addressed, 'Dear Hirohito'. And to make sure that the libellous implication of the cartoon is not missed by the readers, the following lines of Kiplingesque verse appear below the caption :

'FOR THERE IS NEITHER EAST NOR WEST,
BORDER, NOR BREED, NOR BIRTH, WHEN TWO
WRONG MEN STAND FACE TO FACE—

THO' THEY COME FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.'

Need we say that it is a lie—a dirty, stinking lie—to compare Gandhiji to Quisling ?

Lie Number Four:—Yet another cartoon in *Punch* shows a Congressman in Khaddar and Gandhi cap handing over the keys of the citadel of India to the enemy and being stopped by a soldier.

The implication is obvious. Congressmen are Fifth Columnists who are in league with the enemy (presumably Japan) to whom they are conspiring to hand over India.

This, we repeat, is a LIE. Everyone in India knows it to be a lie. Even in Britain many sensible and well-informed people like Laski and Fielden know it is a LIE. And yet if *Punch* chooses to circulate this lie, it forfeits its claim to be clean and honest in its humour. It, too, becomes a part of Britain's Imperial lie-factory.

Lie Number Five:—The *Sunday Dispatch* frontpages a ' cable from H. R. Stimson, *Sunday Dispatch* Reporter in Bombay, in which the following filthy passages appear in the course of a report of the All-India Congress Committee meeting held in August last :

'At one stage the proceedings were stopped while a troupe of dancing girls were brought in to sing and dance to the Congressmen.'

Much has been written already in the local press about this offensive report and Mr Stimson (who, I am told, is a member of the staff of *The Times of India*) is obviously much worried about it. His defence is that the *Sunday Dispatch* people have garbled his original cable which contained nothing of the sort. To substantiate this he is prepared to produce the copy of his original cable and even get it verified by the Censor's office.

But this is too serious a matter to be so easily hushed. No journalist can disclaim responsibility for an article that

appears under his name—unless he is prepared to fight out the issue with the offending newspaper. No editor has a right to add libellous matter—and ‘the dancing girl’ paragraph is nothing short of libellous!—to a correspondent’s report or article. As these lines go to press, I learn that Mr Stimson has addressed a letter to the *Sunday Dispatch* in which he complains of the additions and distortions in his original cable. But the protest that Mr Stimson lodges is too feeble to be effective. He should make a demand for the publication of a contradiction by the paper. If I had been in Mr Stimson’s place, I should have resigned from the *Dispatch* the moment I set eyes on the garbled version of the report.

Moreover, our complaint is not against Mr Stimson personally. Whoever wrote that passage—be he Bob, Tom, Dick or Harry—is responsible for a most heinous crime against all ethics of decent journalism. Nor is this just bad journalism. It is a mischievous attempt to slander a great organization—an organization that is the symbol of Indian nationalism and Indian honour.

Only the editor of the *Sunday Dispatch* can throw some light on the authorship of the offending report. But whoever was responsible is a part of that vast organization—the lie-factory in Britain—which is determined to throw mud at India and slander Indian leaders.

Lie Number Six —Mr Stimson has disclaimed authorship of the cabled report. But in the same issue of the *Sunday Dispatch* there is something else appearing under his name—AND THIS HE HAS NOT DISOWNED!

It is a feature article, ‘There IS a Mrs Gandhi’, in the course of which he makes the following amazing statement—a statement which is a blatant lie and libel on Mahatma Gandhi who is made out to be a callous husband who would make his frail old wife walk three miles, carrying her bedding while he himself goes away in a car. Describing the reception accorded to Gandhiji on his arrival in Bombay, Mr Stimson writes :

‘After 15 minutes, when the platform had virtually emptied, a frail, wizened bare-footed little woman dressed in a homespun cotton sari peered timidly from the window of the same carriage. Unnoticed by anybody, she gathered up her bedding roll and started walking three miles towards Birla House, the sumptuous hostel where Mahatma Gandhi was to stay. She was Gandhi’s wife Kastur Ba, and the incident was symbolic.’

Surely you can't get away with that, Mr Stimson !

We have quoted only six lies about India from three British papers. But there are hundreds of such papers publishing such slanders upon our country and our people. We can't even keep track of them or their authors. The lie-factory is working overtime and we have no time to go through all the rags.

But one day they will have to eat and atone for all these slanderous words—even as they had to eat the vicious words with which they had slandered the Soviet people. Of that I am as sure as that India will soon be free.

OF CAPS AND BEARDS !

—December 6

What distinguishes a Muslim from a Hindu in India ?

I was asked this question by an American journalist and I replied, 'Nothing.' There is no reliable means of identifying a Muslim or a Hindu from his appearance or dress.

But attempts—sometimes well-meaning, but generally insidious—are often made to identify a certain mode of dress with a certain community—to recognize a 'national Muslim dress' along with a 'National Muslim Home'. Such attempts at creating distinctions where none exist at present are dangerous, however good the motives that inspire them. They help to create a psychological atmosphere of disunity. Even a harmless poster may pave the way to Pakistan !

Foreigners, and even many Indians, for instance, seem to accept the Fez cap (also known as Turkish cap) as the universal headgear of Muslims. Again and again it is used to depict and symbolize a Muslim. In his otherwise excellent book, *The Story of India*, Frank Moraes commits the common error of describing the Fez cap as the common, distinguishing headgear of Indian Muslims.

And in last week's *People's War*, I saw the reproduction of a poster issued by the Communist Party of India which

commits the same error. It is a striking poster, eloquent with its strongly-drawn lines which suggest action and determination—something which no National War Front poster has been able to achieve hitherto. The slogan 'HINDU MUSLIM EK HO—QUAMI HIFAZAT KE LIYE ; QUAMI HAKUMAT KE LIYE' is unexceptionable, but the Fez cap on the head of one of the two figures is wrong in fact and wrong in policy for any organization striving for national unity.

Language, dress, food, many of the social customs—these are several points of unity between millions of Hindus and Musli is in the country. Any attempt to suggest the absence of such a unity is a blow at the very monument of unity we are striving to create.

How can the Fez cap be accepted as the 'national head-gear' of the Muslims when over 90 per cent of Muslims do not use it? Banished from Turkey by the edict of the late Kemal Ataturk, a starched version of this cap does survive in Egypt, where it is the recognized 'national headgear' for Muslim and Christian and Jew alike. In other Arab countries the Fez cap generally distinguishes an old Jew. Even in India one can see some of our indigenous old Jews going about fluttering the tassels of their Fez caps.

Mr Jinnah does not wear a Fez cap. He prefers a fur cap of uncertain shape. Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan does not wear a Fez. He affects a white Punjabi turban. H. H. the Aga Khan would sooner be seen in a Riviera straw hat, an English 'topper' or a tropical 'topee' than in the Fez cap. Sir Currimbhai Ebrahim does not wear a Fez cap with his Bond Street suits. The Raja of Mahmudabad crowns himself with a non-white Gandhi cap, Nawab Ismail Khan chooses a fur cap like Mr Jinnah, and Chaudhri Khali-quzzaman also has never been seen in a Fez. Indeed at the last meeting of the Muslim League Working Committee I hardly saw any Fez caps.

There are only two classes of Indians who habitually wear Fez caps—the students of the Aligarh Muslim University and the Victoria drivers of Bombay, whether Hindu or Muslim!

The more one probes this question the more one finds how silly it is to confuse cultural traits and sartorial fashions, which are the result of geography and history and climate, with religious beliefs.

The Muslim peasants of Bengal wear *dhoties*, the Hindus of the Frontier Province wear *shalwars*. The women among Maharashtrian Jews (Bene Israel) drape their saris just like other Maharashtrian women and the South Indian Christians can hardly be distinguished from the members of the other communities.

Nor are beards a correct index of a man's religious affiliations. Here again, foreigners are liable to imagine that Muslims have a monopoly of the hirsute adornment. It was this very error which led an American correspondent to describe Dr Moonje as a 'devout Muslim'. The Hindu Mahasabha champion has an impressive flowing beard, while Mr Jinnah, the *Qaid-e-Azam* of the Muslim League, is clean-shaven. Tagore had a Christ-like beard, while Iqbal, 'the Poet of Islam' had only a moustache. Dr Bhagwandas, the eminent Benares scholar of Hindu scriptures and philosophy, has a patriarchal white beard, while Mr Halim, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the Muslim University, is beardless; Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Maulana Azad, of course, have beards, but so has Babu Purshottamdas Tandon and so had the late Vithalbhai Patel.

The Hindu Rajputs are proud of their fierce martial beards, the Roman Catholic fathers and Jewish rabbis vie with the staunchest Maulanas in the matter of long beards; the *Rishis* and *Swamis* and *Yogis* seldom shave. The 'godless' Karl Marx and atheist Lenin both had beards, and in Europe a 'Blue Beard' denotes the reverse of piety and austerity.

Both among the masses and among the modern sophisticates, it is difficult to distinguish between a Hindu and a Muslim or a Catholic and an atheist. And sometimes the foreign journalist is hopelessly stumped.

An American correspondent had a series of arguments with an Indian journalist extending over a period of several weeks. They discussed every aspect of the Indian problem and finally got stuck over the communal question. The American found the Indian youth a staunch Congressman, a bitter critic of Pakistan and the Muslim League and a violent, uncompromising, advocate of a united India.

'It is all very well for you Hindus to talk like that,' said the American, 'but what about the Muslims?'

'Well, what about them' asked the Indian.

'I can't imagine a single Muslim endorsing your view-point.'

'Then start imagining right now, for I am a Muslim.'
The poor Yank almost collapsed.

1943

...When Bengal Died—Almost—,
Gandhiji Fasted, And An Ignominious
Death Overtook Dictator Mussolini

BREAD AND REVOLUTION

--January 24

'What is a Revolution?'

'I don't know, but it has something to do with food.'

This dialogue from the film version of Pearl Buck's *The Good Earth* sums up what revolutionaries, sociologists and economists have been trying to say for centuries. It points with clear emphasis to the economic basis of a mass upsurge. Also it emphasizes the importance of food in the history of man, the relationship between human stomachs and human souls, between elemental individual wants and social upheavals involving millions.

Twenty thousand Bombay citizens heard those lines of epic social significance last week when the film of Pearl Buck's Nobel-Prize-winning novel was revived after six years of its first run. Much has happened in these six years, the 'good earth' of China has been torn by Japanese bombs, painted red by Chinese blood; centuries-old ideas and social values have been uprooted; a nation of gentle, meek, silently-suffering people has been transformed into a nation of defiant guerrilla fighters. And yet the film had lost none of its original warmth and humanity; had on the contrary, gained in contemporary significance, owing to the important position of China in the present world picture.

And at least one bit of dialogue that had entirely missed its mark so many years ago struck Bombay movie-goers, even in the luxurious atmosphere of the Metro, with its almost uncanny relevance to the present situation in India.

'What is a revolution?' asks O-Lan, the simple Chinese housewife, as the armies of the Republic sweep into a southern city to uproot the Manchu regime. 'I don't know,' replies a man amidst the tumult and turmoil of a hungry population let loose, as he rushes to join the crowd raiding a grocery store, 'but it has something to do with food.'

The Bombay citizens who saw *The Good Earth* had reason to ponder over this piece of dialogue as they emerged from the comfortable, cool and darkened interior of the Metro, so conducive to escapist entertainment, into the hard and

pitiless world of reality outside. And for once they found a significant relevance between what they had seen on the screen and what they were seeing on the streets.

Half-a-mile-long queues of men and women and children at each of the Government grain shops—waiting, patient and uncomplaining, waiting for hours till they can't bear to stand any longer and must sit down to rest; sometimes waiting from dawn to dusk, Hindu and Muslim and Parsi and Christian, clerk and fisherman, journalist and boot-black, 'respectable' matrons and prostitutes, rubbing shoulders in the strange new democracy of hungry stomachs.

There are middle-class homes where wheat has not been eaten for months and *chapatis* have to be made with flour of inferior grains like *rowar* and *buja* which don't always agree with sensitive stomachs. Those who had never eaten rice are now trying to reconcile their palates to rice, those who have always eaten rice can't get enough of it. If you ask for wheat flour the grocer offers you *dal*; at the bakeries if you go to buy bread, you are given cake—stale cake!

If one counted the hours and energy that are expended daily in Bombay City alone by men and women waiting in grain shop queues one would get a staggering figure of the vast amount of man-power that is being wasted. An average householder or housewife spends no less than three hours daily in trying to secure foodstuffs for the family—and not infrequently, returns without the required *Pilec* of rice or grain.

The rich and the upper middle classes are getting their food requirements—at fancy prices and not infrequently from the Black Market. That is the only conclusion one can arrive at because one seldom sees even their servants in the grain shop queues.

The middle-class folk somehow manage to keep pace with the constant rise in commodity prices, cutting down the few luxuries they once allowed themselves to pay the increased price of grains and rice and milk. But what of the poorer classes who found it difficult to subsist on their pittance of earnings even before the steep incline in the price of their daily bread? It is a constant wonder to me how they manage to keep body and soul together.

For centuries malnutrition has been the crying curse of poverty-ridden India. Millions of our peasants and workers never got a square, nutritive meal in their life, millions of their children grew to be rickety and thin-boned because in their childhood they never got sufficient fresh milk or vitamin substitutes. How will the generation now in the cradle look when it grows up into manhood?

When talking of this, a friend remarked that in war-time all peoples have to make sacrifices in the matter of food—Indians not excused. But this is a cruelly fallacious view to take. It is a different thing for sturdy Britons to switch over from butter to margarine, to drink less tea and eat more oats; but where is the margin for further cutting down of the Indian diet which for millions of us has been barely above the starvation level?

The food problem is not merely the problem of opening a few more grain shops or transferring a few wagon-loads of grain from the Punjab to Bombay. In other words it is not merely a problem of scarcity of grain, but also of scarcity of money to buy the grain with!

In *The Good Earth* there are vivid scenes of a famine-stricken area, showing how the earth dries up and cracks, how the cattle and the humans have to live by eating roots, and even mud, how 'hunger makes men mad.' This is what we see on the screen, and, perhaps, the complacent Bombay crowd thought of it as something that can happen only in far off China. But in India, we have had famines as acute as the one so dramatically and poignantly depicted in *The Good Earth*. Only two years ago there was a serious famine in nearby Gujarat. Today, as I write this, I have before me the series of articles about the famine conditions in Bijapur, less than 500 miles from Bombay, written by Mr Dinkar Desai in recent issues of the *Chronicle*. Here there is a remarkable parallel to *The Good Earth* famine. Peasants are forced to sell their precious cattle for paltry sums—just as the peasant hero of *The Good Earth* had to do. They are migrating from the district—as they did in China. They are selling off their property and land. And, as in China of those days there is no adequate arrangements for relief, no system of planned migration, no organized remedies.

to ameliorate the condition of the people. But while *The Good Earth* excites our pity, we complacently turn over the pages when we read of Bijapur. Tragedy near at home, has lost even its power to move our emotions.

Look again at the queues in front of the grain shop in your neighbourhood which wait all day—and yet sometimes only 30 out of a crowd of 900 get their quota of grain! Multiply these queues by a million. Add to it the famine conditions of Bijapur and other places. Then ponder over what is happening in this country. The faces in the queues look quiet and patient and meek.

But how many times will people be turned away with empty hands from the grain shop?

So serious a crime is the hoarding of and profiteering in people's food that in other countries such profiteers are promptly shot. Both in China and Russia, they give short shrift to profiteers in food. This is remarkable in Soviet Russia, because, in that country capital punishment has been abolished for all crimes except high treason against the proletarian State. But at a time like this, to deprive the mass of the population of its daily bread by illegal hoarding or selling of grain has been regarded as a crime equal in its menace to high treason. And high treason, indeed, it is—treason against one's fellow-countrymen, treason against humanity!

When one finds, therefore, that in Bombay there are people who have been found guilty of the unpardonable crime of hoarding grain, one cannot help feeling that the few months' imprisonment awarded to them is hardly punishment enough for their ignoble crimes. Only recently several thousand bags of rice and grain were discovered hidden in obscure corners of the city—several thousand bags of grain lying intact while the hungry population was crying aloud for bread and those who had the money were paying as much as two rupees for a seer of wheat flour!

Can anything be more despicable, more condemnable than this deliberate, wilful theft of people's food? It is more

than theft. It is nothing short of mass murder of the hungry population by a slow process of starvation and must be punished as severely as possible.

The problem of bread is the problem of life. Nothing is more important than this—neither morality nor patriotism, neither religion nor politics, neither love nor loyalty. A Gandhi or Bhansali may rise above the call of the flesh—which fundamentally is the call for bread—but for the vast mass of us mortal men and women, food remains the prime necessity of life. And it will remain the goal of our life activity and endeavour—till the birth of a new economic order which guarantees the elementary materials needs and thus releases human energy to flow in channels of more creative, purposeful living.

It is not the Marxists alone who stress the importance of the two hungers of man—and the hunger for food is the more urgent and important of the two. Even religion, supposed to be above such animal instincts as hunger, cannot ignore it altogether. And, in all religions and in all languages, the prayer goes up from a million lips—a prayer to the Lord to “give us this day our daily bread!”

HE DIED FOR CHINA

February, 7

Far away in the interior of China, a man lay dying in the ghostly hour that precedes dawn in those hills of the North-West

Death is an old and familiar friend of the Chinese people. Men and women and children have always been dying in China—dying of starvation, of disease, of torture and persecution dying in floods, in droughts, and famines, dying of bitter winter in one part of the country and of sunstroke in another. For the last six years a human scourge has been added to the scourges of nature they were hitherto afflicted with—a scourge more deadly than any plague known to history. Millions of Chinese have been dying of Japanese bombs, of Japanese bullets and shrapnel, poison gas, disease-germ bombs, dying of Japanese bayonets and of Japanese kicks.

Yes, death at all hours and in all circumstances, is a common enough occurrence in the war-torn China of today. And yet there was something poignantly significant about this death in the early hours of December 9—something that summed up and symbolized all the millions of other deaths in China, and yet distinguished it from them all. There was something about the man who was dying that was uncommon, gallant, noble and inspiring.

First, the man was young,—even the creeping shadow of death could not obscure the features of the handsome young face.

Second, the man who was dying was a Doctor—a healer of men! Until a few days before his death when he had an epileptic stroke, this young Doctor had been working day and night to look after the wounded and the sick, examining, prescribing, operating, amputating, dressing, injecting, inoculating, fighting disease and death. It was the strain of this over-work that finally laid him low.

Third, this man who was dying in an obscure village in the interior of China, this man who had been working with the Chinese armies to look after their wounded and sick, who was admired by Chinese Generals and loved by the Chinese soldiers, was not a Chinese. He was an Indian. His name was Dwarkanath S. Kotnis.

By the side of the death-bed sat, mute and grief-stricken a young Chinese woman—wife of the Indian Doctor whom she had married in China. In her arms she held the infant son—the little symbol of Indo-Chinese unity. The man who was dying cast a look at his wife and son. What were his thoughts about them? He was a Doctor and he knew he was dying.

But he was not afraid. He had been fighting death for four long years and on many occasions he had vanquished it with the aid of Science, and his own skill and sympathy. Today, as death put his icy hand on his fevered brow he could take his own defeat with a sporting smile.

No, he was not afraid. His wife was a brave woman, she had dedicated her life to the service of her country. The officers of the Eighth Route Army, the indomitable Reds of China, with whom he had been working, were kind and considerate. They would surely look after his wife when he was gone. And she would bring up their son in a free China. Yes, about that he had no doubt. China would drive out the invader. He had seen the Chinese fight and knew all the armies of Japan would never be able to crush the spirit of the Chinese people. China would be free.

Outside the hospital hut, a thick fog hung above the surrounding hills of China's North-West. But in those last flickering moments of life, the thoughts of Dwarkanath Koinis were escaping from the stifling hut, vaulting over the range of hills, flying across the vast, limitless plain of China. His thoughts flew to India, to Bombay, where he had been educated and where lived many of his friends, to Sholapur, his home town, where he was born and brought up. He thought of his father who had died during the son's absence away in China. He thought of his brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces, friends and playmates of childhood. With melancholy emotion he thought of his mother and how the old lady would suffer when she got the news of her son's death in China.

But above all else, he thought of his country—India. As a student of the Medical College, he had not had much time to think of the future of his country. Then, beyond a vague idealism and patriotism that he shared with other young Indians of his generation, he had not much knowledge of politics. He had come here more with an idea of seeking adventure than anything else, but contact with the grim reality of a nation at war with a blood-thirsty aggressor had changed him. It had changed him and hardened him, given his vague idealism a direction, and his sense of adventure found expression in selfless devotion to duty, regardless of the risk to his life. The spark of patriotism leapt into a pure

time when he saw the patriotic struggle of the Chinese people. Now he understood the national aspirations of his own people, their agitations and struggles, with a clear perception of the issues involved. Also, contact with the 'Reds' of the Eighth Route Army—peasant and worker heroes who faced the Japanese hordes with the same grim determination as earlier they had shown in their prolonged struggle against their own Central Government armies—turned Kotnis into more than a patriot. In the gallant heroism of these simple folk of China who were *living* rather than *preaching* Communism, he saw the future hope of the world—a pattern based on social justice and economic freedom for the masses.

As the steam of life ebbed away from the gallant body of Dwarkanath Kotnis, what vision did he see of the future of the country of his birth and the country of his adoption—India and China?

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More than England and more than America, India has been a nation of confirmed anti-Fascists. When Britain was trying to strangle Turkey, Indians were sending a Medical Mission to Turkey. When British and American capitalists were financing and abetting the terror of the White counter-revolution in Russia, Indians were loudly proclaiming their sympathy with the workers' State. When Britain's Samuel Hoare was conspiring with Laval of France to stab Abyssinia in the back, our Jawaharlal was refusing to meet or shake hands with Mussolini, the murderer of Matteotti. When Chamberlain was flying to Munich to placate Hitler, our Jawaharlal was flying to Madrid to support the anti-Fascist heroes of Spain.

When, to please Japan, Britain was closing the Burma Road and thus cutting off China's only lifeline of supplies, and American capitalists were selling arms to Japan, our Medical Mission was trudging weary miles in China to render whatever help it was possible to render to the anti-Fascists of China. And when American and British statesmen were only talking of sympathy with China, our Doctor Kotnis was breathing his last, dying that China might live!

It is necessary to recall these facts, as we pay reverent and affectionate homage to the memory of Kotnis, because a campaign of lies has been started all over the world to

represent Indian nationalists as friends of Fascism and enemies of democracy. Our leaders are in jail and, therefore, cannot repudiate the slander. But Dwarkanath Kotnis has answered the vile accusations by putting upon his sacrifice in the cause of freedom the final, irrefutable stamp of death.

The Eighth Route Army is raising a memorial to him to express their affection and gratitude. And in the years to come the name of Kotnis will become a legend in the remotest villages of China, and grandmothers will tell their little children about the 'brave Doctor from India' who treated the wounds of their fathers—wounds that the Japanese had inflicted and that an Indian Doctor healed! The slanders of the anti-Indian yellow press of London and New York will be forgotten one day, but the memory of men like Kotnis will remain reminding the world that even while struggling for their national freedom, Indians did not forget their comrades in other lands similarly engaged in their own struggle for freedom.

OUR TURKISH GUESTS

—February 21

The Turkish press delegates are now in Bombay, having arrived at the 'Gateway of India' at the tail-end of their Indian tour, while, in other and more peaceful times, if they had arrived by the sea route, this city would have been the first to welcome them.

Their tour will long be remembered for its own sake and for some of its repercussions. This is one of the few instances, if not exactly the first, when the Government of India manifested an international outlook, by inviting such a delegation from a foreign country. Perhaps the exigencies and diplomacies of the war situation had something to do with it, perhaps it is just that the Government of India is becoming internationally-minded. Whatever the motives of

the Government in inviting them, there is no doubt that the visit of the Turkish delegation was popularly acclaimed as a welcome event. They arrived as Government guests, but they were 'adopted' as guests of the nation—people of all classes and communities and political affiliations vying with one another in extending hospitality to the six gentlemen from Turkey. India has always had an affectionate regard for Turkey and the visit of the delegation gave us an opportunity to demonstrate it.

During their stay in India, short as it has been, our friends from Turkey have seen quite a lot of our country and our people. They have met the Viceroy and the Commander-in-Chief, and been shown round the defence arrangements in the country, they have met Nawabs and Maharajas, seen 'wild life' in India's jungle, met Ministers, politicians, officials, legislators, journalists, merchants, Muslim Leaguers, Liberals—and also perhaps a few Congressmen (out of jail). They have seen the incomparable beauty of the Taj and also (one hopes) the squalid misery in which India's millions live in the villages—and pondered why! They have attended parties, luncheons and banquets. Passing along the busy city streets, in limousines provided by the Government, it is also possible they saw the queues in front of our grain shops.

They haven't met Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru—nor the other Congress leaders. The Turks are guests of the Government—so are the Indian leaders, though in a different sense, of course. And as we have already learnt from the replies given by them at press conferences, the Turkish journalists are tactful people who would not embarrass their hosts by insisting on including a certain unspecified jail or Aga Khan's palace in Poona in their itinerary. But we know they would surely have liked to meet the Congress leaders, most of whom have had a very old and close connexion with the Turkish Nationalists and the Turkish national movement.

Mahatma Gandhi, after all, is the man who (along with the late Ali Brothers) carried on a country-wide agitation for redress of the wrong done to Turkey by European imperialists. Indeed, he incorporated the demand for Turkish independence as one of the cardinal points of India's National Demand, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's is a household

name in the intellectual circles of all the Eastern countries as one of the greatest living authorities on the Quran, Islamic theology and philosophy. As for Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the delegates, as well-informed journalists, must surely be aware that he is the acknowledged 'Foreign Minister' of nationalist India, who has done more than anyone else to forge international contacts between free and democratic peoples of the world and the Indian nationalist movement.

It was Jawaharlal who was responsible for the visit of a delegation from the Wafd Party of Egypt who came to India early in 1939, as guests of the Indian National Congress. The reception that the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee accorded them at the Ballard Pier, as also the thunderous cheers with which they were greeted by a hundred thousand Congress members at the Tripuri session of the Congress, was proof positive of the fraternal feelings of India for the freedom-loving people of Egypt.

There is not the least doubt that in different and happier circumstances nationalist India would have given a similar rousing welcome to the guests from Turkey—not a formal, official reception, but a warm-hearted, and full-throated 'people's reception' that would have forged another golden link between the peoples of the two countries. Today they have to accept the wish for the deed, and in the circumstances which make such a popular reception impossible is a significant message which I hope they won't fail to carry back with them to Turkey.

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Jawaharlal Nehru is in jail and cannot personally welcome the Turkish delegates. But we quote below some of his observations about Turkey from his *Glances of World History* which will be of interest to our Turkish friends, as reflecting the views of the great Indian leader. This is what he writes in the chapter 'A New Turkey Rises From the Past':

"I remember well how we rejoiced when we heard of Mustafa Kemal's great victory over the Greeks. This was the battle of Afium Qarabasar in August, 1922, when he broke the Greek front and drove the Greek army to Smyrna and the sea. Many of us were in the Lucknow District Jail then, and we celebrated the Turkish triumph by decorating our prison barrack with such odds-and-ends as we could gather, and there was even an attempt at illumination in the evening."

WHO WINS IF GANDHI LOSES?

—February, 28

It is a terrible thing to have to write a weekly page six days in advance of its date of publication.

It is excruciating and agonizing at a moment like this when the life of a man whom one has learnt to love and cherish more than father or mother, brother or bosom friend, hangs in the balance by the slenderest thread and one's heart misses a beat every time the teleprinter starts clicking, fearing the worst, even while desperately hoping for the best. What will happen in the next six days, the next six hours, the next six minutes? One dare not guess, one dare not think; one only waits, a bundle of hopes and fears, the rational man completely overpowered by the emotional animal.

All around me, from the editor to the office boy, everyone's mind is on one topic only. Hard-boiled sub-editors and cynical reporters are trying to hide their anguish under a cloak of commonplace banalities, ashamed to confess to their feelings. The telephones are constantly ringing, day and night, there are anxious enquiries from a thousand homes and offices. If only one could give them one word of cheer, one word of hope! But one can't. The news services have failed to measure up to the immensity of the situation—or perhaps they are themselves feeling helpless! For twelve or fourteen hours sometimes there is not one word from Poona.

And, meanwhile, rumour holds sway over the city—all kinds of rumours fly about the city, stupid rumours, pathetic rumours, born out of instinctive wish-fulfilment, intelligent guesses, unintelligent deductions, careless assumptions, frantic hopes, desperate forebodings. In homes and offices, shops and restaurants, trains and buses, in mansions and on foot-paths, there is only one topic of discussion—Gandhiji and his fast. Will he survive the ordeal? Will he be released? Or will he? One shudders to mention the catastrophic alternative.

It is an agonizing moment—agonizing and yet uplifting, so that one feels exalted even in the face of impending tragedy. Whatever the result, these moments belong to history—not the history that is the record of conquests and

wars, but the greater, more glorious history of the evolution of man towards a purer, better life based on the ideals of truth and justice. It is a privilege to be contemporaries of a man of such spiritual stature, to be witnesses of such a supreme sacrifice.

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Gandhiji's fast is a challenge to the conscience of man. Already news is trickling down, Reuter and the Censor notwithstanding, that this conscience has been aroused—at least in some quarters—both in England and America. Desperate attempts are being made to bring the pressure of world public opinion on the authorities in Whitehall and New Delhi. But as the wires hum between Washington and London, between London and New Delhi, possibly also between Chungking and London, the sands of life are running out of the frail body lying in the Aga Khan's palace. And in the minds of hundreds of millions is but one fateful question: Will it be too late? Will it be too late?

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Two great men one misses today in this hour of crisis—Rabindranath Tagore and Doctor Mukhtar Ahmed Ansari.

Tagore, the poet of the East, the exultant voice of India, would no doubt have used his world-wide reputation and influence to save Gandhiji's life. As Mr Rathindranath Tagore, the Poet's only son, has said in a statement: 'If my father were alive today his powerful voice would have reverberated all over the world in a mighty appeal to move the conscience of mankind.'

The late Doctor Ansari, it will be remembered, was present by Gandhiji's side during all his other fasts except the Rajkot one. Not only as a physician but as a dear friend Gandhiji had implicit faith in him. Indeed, during the first fast in 1921, undertaken in the interests of Hindu-Muslim unity, Gandhiji had promised Dr Ansari that if at any stage he and his other medical advisers felt that further prosecution of the fast might prove fatal to his life, he would give it up. The *National Call* columnist recalls an important incident connected with this fast which bears repetition if only to help one to contemplate the consequences of the present fast with a little more optimism than the circumstances permit.

'It appears that on a particular day, it was probably the 14th day, Mahatma Gandhi had become very weak. His urine had been tested and they discovered in it a dangerous abundance of 'casts' or something, any further increase of which, according to the medical advisers, was a signal of serious danger. According to Dr Ansari these "casts" denoted a physical condition which could only be improved or rectified by administering something more than water, on which Mahatma Gandhi subsisted

'Dr Ansari and other medical advisers immediately told Mahatma Gandhi that they considered the situation serious and they wanted him to redeem his pledge by breaking his fast. Mahatma Gandhi told Dr Ansari that he stood by his promise and that if God had willed that he should not successfully fulfil the ordeal he would break his fast after 24 hours if the condition which Dr Ansari and his colleagues considered alarming persisted. From that time onwards, according to Dr Ansari and his colleagues, Mahatma Gandhi engaged in a tremendous spiritual struggle with himself. Twenty-four hours passed. The urine was carefully examined again. To the utter surprise of Dr Ansari and his colleagues, the "casts" had practically disappeared. Dr Ansari told me that medical science at least could offer no explanation for this extraordinary physical change. On the 21st day Mahatma Gandhi broke his fast to the reading of the Quran and the Gita.'

Dr Ansari, I remember, once referred to this 'miracle' in a medical talk on fasting that he was asked to broadcast by All-India Radio, Delhi. The bureaucrats of A. I. R., however, got frightened by the very mention of Gandhiji's name and scored out whole sentences and paragraphs from the manuscript of the speech. The Doctor, of course, refused to deliver the censored talk, and in future had nothing to do with All-India Radio.

Will history repeat itself and Gandhiji be saved by a miracle like the one in 1921? Will he survive his self-imposed ordeal and be alive at 8 a.m. on Tuesday, the 2nd of March? Or will, meanwhile, the Government recover sufficient imagination and sense of justice to avert the crisis by unconditionally releasing him?

In either case, the nation would be immeasurably relieved.

Day by day, hour by hour, people are watching the struggle that goes on in that frail little body—a defiant struggle against death!

It is a struggle of soul against body, of truth against untruth. For the sake of India, of the Allied cause, and of

humanity at large, it is necessary that Gandhiji must win this grim battle. He must win! He must win! Who wins if Gandhiji loses?

THE ORDEAL IS OVER!

—March 7

A nation heaves a sigh of relief and thanksgiving.

The ordeal is over—the twenty-one days of anguish and waiting, pleading and praying, hoping and despairing, and hoping again.

The objective, political situation, at least apparently remains unchanged. The political parleys, the arguments and counter-arguments, the 'growls' and counter-growls' will no doubt continue. But the human drama—one of the most nobly-enacted, anxiously watched human dramas ever witnessed in history—is over. Whatever the political repercussions or the lack of them, the really important thing at the moment is that mercifully the drama did not end in a tragedy.

For twenty Indian and foreign correspondents this morning ended the strangest assignment in their journalistic careers.

To the foreigners—two British and six Americans, including two women—the occasion was an odd, almost startling, contrast to the various phases of the war they had been recently 'covering'. Even the few of them who tried sympathetically to view and study the fast in the perspective of the political situation leading up to it, found it difficult to reconcile the self-invited ordeal of 'India's strange man' with any of their previous ideas and experiences.

To men and women fresh from the gory spectacle of blood-stained battlefields, a frail little man denying himself food and drink for three weeks to vindicate his honour and his principles must appear as a strange kind of political warfare. Also, they were stumped by their inability to be any-

where near the centre and source of the news, having to depend on second-hand reports and gossip, and the shadow of local Censor hovering above them to score out any 'political' references in their cables.

No wonder then that the best of them were puzzled, while the rest only hunted about for irrelevant tit-bits, trying to serve their readers with 'local colour' and a touch of the 'mysterious Orient', thus 'glamorizing' and 'sensationalizing' an event which needed a sober, yet simple explanation. Thus 'pariah dogs squatting in front of the Aga Khan's palace' (?) and Poona's dust figured more prominently in some of these despatches than the moral and political implications of the fact and the significant reactions produced by it in the country as manifested by three resignations from the Viceroy's Council and the unanimous demand for Gandhiji's release voiced by every section of the Indian people.

The Indian correspondents, however, were in an altogether different sort of dilemma. Prevented from direct approach to the Mahatma, they had—individually and collectively—developed their special sources of news. They were veritably bursting with news, not only about Gandhiji's health and the goings-on within the Aga Khan's bungalow, but also about the relevant political situation in general. From interviews and private talks with public figures like Rajaji and Mr Aney, from intelligent deductions and clever 'lobbying' in both Government and nationalist camps, some of them were in possession of highly interesting information. But none of it ever saw the light of day. The epitaph will read: 'Killed By Censor'.

While waiting for Dr B. C. Roy at his residence for the usual midday press conference, one news-agency man told me what a trying time these three weeks had meant to him. 'Imagine my ordeal,' he said, 'I have to work nearly sixteen hours a day—from 8 a.m. to 12 midnight—cycling about the dusty hot roads back and forth in this small town of long distances. And at the end of the day, I see not even a dozen lines of my stuff passing into print.' It was a clear case of the frustration of a newsman.

Also, I learnt how this same news-agency reporter, with the occasional company of a colleague representing a daily newspaper, spent three nights sleeping under the stars on the

ground in front of the Aga Khan's bungalow, keeping a lonely nocturnal vigil during the critical period of the fast. And while the days are hot in Poona, the nights—particularly out in the open country—can be bitterly cold !

But the interest of these Indian Journalists 'covering' the fast was not merely professional. To the strain of news-gathering under peculiar conditions—one of them described it as searching for a needle in a total black-out—was added the deep personal concern that each of them, without exception, felt for the life that was at stake. Hard-boiled and experienced as most of them were, yet this was the one assignment they could not 'cover' unemotionally—as newsmen are ever supposed to do !

As they waited with the patience characteristic of their profession, each of them recalled with evident emotion the many contacts with the man whose name has spelt NEWS for the last three decades—the Congress sessions, the public meetings, the press conferences, the exclusive 'scoop' interviews, the Dandi march, the Gandhi-Irwin negotiations, the Round Table Conference trip to London, the Harijan fast, the Rajkot fast, the last Bombay session of the A.-I.C.C., the arrest on that fateful early morning of August 9. And as, care-worn and anxious, they waited, day after day, hour after hour, in the mind of each was the unuttered question : Is it the end of an epoch in the history of India ? If it were so, they would be there to witness a great moment, perhaps the most tragic and most significant in the life of their nation. A professional newsman would give his right arm to be witness at such a climax. And yet in the heart of each of them was but one wish : He must live ! He must live !

And where newsmen are concerned, that is a rare phenomenon—almost a miracle !—as rare as Gandhiji's survival of 21 days' ordeal !

HE IS NO LONGER TWENTY-FIVE

—March 14

Beverley Nichols is in India at least that is what we learn from a 'passed-for-publication' yellow paper blurb from the Government of India Information Department. Headlined, 'Beverley Nichols's Mission In India', the 400-word despatch, sub-edited by 800-rupees a month Information Officers, edited by a 2000-rupees a month Principal Information Officer, contains exactly 21 words of original text to this effect:

'The following article in the *Sunday Chronicle*, London, by Beverley Nichols, who is now in India, may be of interest. It was written on the eve of his departure for India.'

The rest is a straight quotation, just like all the other stuff doled out by these high-salaried 'Information Officers'. In any case, they don't seem to possess much information about Mr Nichols. Or do they think, in the manner of pompous chairmen of public meetings, that 'Mr Nichols is too well known to need any introduction'?

For the sake of our readers who may not be very well up in their reading of sophisticated modern English literature, we may mention that Beverley Nichols is one of the bright boys and prodigies of post-war England. Handsome to a degree, almost a 'mama's darling', Beverley Nichols was one of the most brilliant undergraduates at Oxford, where he made quite a reputation as a debater at the Union, and before he was 20, published two novels, *Prelude* and *Patchwork*, which, for one so young, were regarded as something of a sensational achievement. Then came a war-time visit to the United States as Secretary of a British educational mission and, some time later, some journalistic work, climaxed by a mysterious assignment in Greece as a guest of the Queen—presumably to use his vigorous young pen to boost the falling stock of a decaying monarchy.

Thus, by the time he was twenty-five, young Mr Nichols had crowded a lifetime of interesting contacts and splashy events and proceeded to write the most audacious, the most amusing, the most provocative and the most sensational

autobiography that any young man has ever dared to write. Overnight it became a best-seller, it was avidly read by youths with literary or artistic ambitions as a source of inspiration, indeed it became a symbol of post-war youth—daring, audacious, self-conscious and yet self-assured, impatient and adventurous, agnostic, cynical and socialistic! With the advent of the Penguin 6d editions the book became a familiar sight in the rooms of Indian collegians. Thousands became Beverley Nichols fans.

Then the most terrible thing happened to Beverley Nichols. He grew up.

Followed an amazing series of literary and ideological somersaults. The successful Mr Nichols became a pacifist and wrote the brilliant but hardly convincing *Cry Havoc*, which provoked a reply from Bengal Lancer Yeats-Brown in the shape of *Dogs of War*. Mr Nichols became a columnist, Mr Nichols became a celebrity, attended champagne parties, was invited to Mayfair mansions by society hostesses, Mr Nichols came to be regarded as 'the best-dressed literary figure'. Mr Nichols bought a 'lovely cottage and started growing flowers'.

Now and then Mr Nichols wrote, too, but that old, youthful, iconoclastic fire was gone. Instead he re-discovered his Christianity (as the great atheist Joad was to do later) and dabbled in the Oxford Group movement, developing a sweet-sweet daffodil-and-chrysanthemum style which provoked *Punch* to review one of his books (perhaps *No Place Like Home*) as having been written by an old spinster in love with her cottage and her garden. Meanwhile, Mr Nichols had started on a trip to India but got held up in Egypt, so fascinated by the Pyramids and the hospitality of the British High Commissioner, Sir Miles Lampson, that he began wondering if there was not something in Imperialism after all.

Last heard of, Beverley Nichols was throwing a party to celebrate the publication of his novel, *Revue*, and toasting a leading lady of the revue stage in champagne.

Now he comes to India on a 'mission'. Sponsored by whom? Private individuals are not able so easily to flit about the war-torn world. In his *Sunday Chronicle* article he tells us :

'I am on my way to India. I am going because I believe that what is known as the Indian problem is urgent and delicate, that it has worldwide ramifications ; and that its importance will increase as months go by ; and—to speak frankly—because neither you nor I nor our American friends are sufficiently well-informed about the subject. It is vitally important that we should know the facts. I want to discover at least some of them.'

Quite an ambitious project, Mr Nichols ! You see, we of this country are not quite gullible lads of 'twenty-five', and we are developing an inevitable tendency to suspect soft-spoken British sympathizers and their 'missions'—specially missions which are publicized by the official propaganda-agencies.

A KISS THAT SHOOK THE WORLD !

—April 18

I find a lot of rationed newspaper space being used up these days on the alleged kisses in a certain Marathi film now being shown in Bombay.

A filmmagazine has headlined the event all over a page in its review of the film, while a columnist announces that 'the first *Indian* film with *real* kissing is being shown at the moment', quoting a 'student wit' to the effect that 'If Hitler could just see *that* kiss once, he would stand still gazing on long enough to let the Allies land in Western Europe, may be even long enough to let them come right into Berlin.'

Meanwhile, a battle royal rages in the ranks of film fans—Modernism *versus* Orthodoxy, Kissing *versus* Non-Kissing ! The picture (all its other qualities or weaknesses ignored !) is being praised and condemned, held up as an ideal and decried as a moral perversity, all because of the kissing

part of it. It is being seen, re-seen, discussed and debated all over Marathi-speaking Bombay. Will its example be followed by other Indian films? That is the question being asked on all hands, with the arguments for and against, started all over again.

The producers of the film may well smile amusedly at all the stir created by this kiss. For the kiss is no kiss at all. It is just the illusion of kissing, conjured up by a trick of the camera, stimulated sound effects, and clever 'cutting' in the editing room—so that a mere preface-to-a-kiss acquires all the thrills of an osculatory climax.

The only *Real* kissing so far registered on the Indian screen was in *Zarinah*, a gypsy film produced nearly ten years ago, starring Zubaidah and Jal Merchant. There was kissing in that film—and how! Since then Indian screen heroes and heroines have been dilly-dallying about the problem, holding hands, gazing tenderly into each other's eyes, speaking the suggestive, 'promiseful' language of love, even caressing each other's arms and sometimes indulging in an awkward, self-conscious embrace, but up to the time of writing they don't seem to have made up their minds to

} *press lips against lips*
} *in an immortal kiss!*

THEY ARE TOUGH!

—May 23

Present in Bombay this week are over a hundred writers from all over India—from the north, from the south, from Bengal and from the U. P., from Andhra and from Assam! They write in a dozen different languages—in Hindi, Urdu, Bengali, Marathi, Gujerati, Tamil, Telugu, Kanarese and Malayalam and not a few who write in English.

They call themselves 'progressive writers' and they have come to Bombay to attend a conference.

It is not easy for a writer in India to afford to travel thousands of miles to attend a conference. Much more difficult for a 'progressive' writer. If a writer in India lives on a pittance, the progressive writer literally starves. And yet over a hundred of them have managed to come to Bombay from places as far off as Aligarh, Lucknow, the and remotest towns of Andhra and Assam. They have begged, borrowed and stolen, but they have come. And that by itself is a measure of their earnestness—and their toughness!

Yes, one has to be tough to be a progressive writer. Not long ago (at least in the U. P. and the Punjab) a progressive writer who expressed himself too freely on the two tabooed subjects—Sex and Religion—was not unlikely to have his skull broken, and in one case when he happened to be a 'she', a threat was held out that her nose would be chopped off as punishment for a short story on birth-control that she had written and published in an anthology. All over India many progressives have had their realistic writings branded as obscene, their books burnt and banned, and not infrequently they have had to appear in a court of law. The snobs and connoisseurs of highbrow literature, from their ivory towers, ridiculed these iconoclastic youths, labelled their writings as 'pornographic piffle', called them literary vagabonds. The established literary reviews denied the hospitality of their pages to progressive writings, the publishers of books would not touch them with a barge-pole.

And yet they survived. They survived because they were tough—and because they were writing realistically about life, and what they wrote hit hard and straight. The demand for their writings grew and the very magazines that had rejected them now clamoured for this same 'pornographic' literature. Books by young progressive writers ousted the old, fossilized favourites in at least three languages—Bengali, Marathi and Urdu. Here and there, a young literary star shot up on the international horizon—a Mulk Raj Anand, a Raja Rao, an Ahmed Ali. They competed with English intellectuals on their own ground—not as mystical 'Orientals' read for their 'quaint' and flowery language and the 'picturesquely' Oriental atmosphere of their novels, but as competent, realistic observers of Indian life, with an international vision and outlook. Today India's progressive writers are

still (more or less) starving. But they have become a 'force to be reckoned with, and the older 'romanticist', reactionary writers are beginning to claim 'progressive' tendencies, trying to appear in borrowed and ill-fitting plumes!

THEY CALLED HIM CHINK!

—July 11

[They called Him Yellow!

[They called Him Chink!

[They thought he was cringing because he was polite.

[They thought he was conservative, rooted in the past a misfit in the modern world because he had three thousand years of culture behind him.

They envied his possessions, they grabbed what they could, they forced unequal treaties down his throat, acquired his ports, forced opium on him. He was too proud to squeal, too peaceful, too civilized, even to swear at them.

One of them, his next-door neighbour, decided to move into his spacious mansion, rob it of all its wealth, turn the householder into a slave.

This ungrateful neighbour had once borrowed a lot from the peaceful old man—language, literature, culture and religion. Now he repaid with death and destruction, murder and rapine. One by one, the courtyards, the corridors, the halls of the old mansion were being usurped by the aggressor and the ancient gentleman was withdrawing into the interior, still clinging to the illusion of peace.

Then, one day, six years ago, the man of peace decided that: he could endure aggression no more. He decided to fight, took off his philosopher's robes and buckled on sword and armour. He was not used to modern warfare, he had no tanks, no planes, no poison gas, but what he lacked in material resources he made up by his unconquerable spirit.

The world prophesied his certain defeat. According to all military calculations, he ought to have been vanquished a hundred times by now. But, as the seventh year dawned, he was still fighting. Fighting determinedly, grimly, fighting alone.

They all sympathized with him, but did nothing to help him. They supplied his enemy with tin and petroleum for his bombs and his bombers. They cut off his only lifeline of communications as a gesture of goodwill towards the men of bad will! Yet he fought on!

Today, they are his Allies and friends. Yet they send him precious little material help. But he fights on. And he *will* fight on. For he is fighting for freedom, for survival, for peace and justice among mankind.

Of all the peoples in the world, he was least interested in war. He tried to avoid it, even at the cost of personal honour, as long as he possibly could. But when his children were bayoneted and his wife and mother and sisters raped and his farms and cottages burnt down, he took up arms with the determination that he would not put them down till he was free! That's why he has fought, and fights today, and will continue to fight—with the help of friends if possible, alone, if necessary.

He is China, our friend and neighbour. In this hour of grim destiny, alas, we can send him nothing more than salutations and goodwill, perhaps a few doctors and medical supplies. But he is wise and he will understand why we cannot send more tangible and concrete manifestations of our faith and our friendship.

NO APPLE-PIES FOR AMERY

—July 25

Mr Amery says Indians are eating too much because of inflation. Mr Amery ought to come to India and visit Bijapur.

How would the Secretary of State for India like to live on 30 tolas (three-quarters of a pound) of *bajri* bread per day? Just that and no more except, perhaps, a little *chutney*. No bacon-and-eggs for breakfast, no butter (or even margarine), no milk, no tea, no coffee, no steaks, no fruits, no vegetables, no marmalade, no jam, no apple-pies not even a tea-spoonful of sugar! Just a few *bajri chapatis*—and those too grossly insufficient for an adult appetite.

This is the diet on which tens of thousands of people are subsisting in Bijapur. And some don't get even that much! The district is in the grip of a famine compared with which our own food rationing difficulties look ridiculously trifling. Many of the people in that district cannot even get clean well-water and have to drink out of dirty pools.

The Government is providing famine relief, as usual, on an inadequate scale. For 30 tolas of *bajri* a man is expected to work the whole day in the scorching sun, building roads, breaking stones or making 'bunds' for fields!

The public cannot just sit back and criticize the authorities. Tens of thousands are starving—possibly starving to death! There is not a moment to be lost. The conscience of Bombay must be awakened to the needs of the situation. Every pie that we can spare we must send to Bijapur. It is war on hunger, war on death. It won't get you a title, but you will have the satisfaction of feeling that you have saved some of your countrymen from starvation.

The Bombay Bijapur Relief Committee has appealed for sixty thousands rupees which are immediately needed to start field kitchens for the starving population.

If the heart of Bombay is touched, this amount can be subscribed in a day—in an hour! In one evening Bombay spends about a lakh of rupees on cinemas. In one day, Bombay spends over a lakh on tea, a bigger amount on trams and trains and buses. At some of the bigger hotels and clubs and bars, over a lakh's worth of champagne and brandy and beer is drunk in a single evening. Cannot the 20 lakhs of Bombayites pull out of their pockets an average of half-an-anna each? One cup less out of your daily dozen cups of tea might mean all the difference between life and death to a man or woman or child in Bijapur.

THE END OF A DICTATOR

—August 1

Unwept, unhonoured and unsung—indeed, heartily kicked and heartily damned—Benito Mussolini quitted the world stage last week. There were no tears shed for him in India.

Of the three Axis partners, he was the one most cordially despised in India. Though there were some who once had the weak man's sneaking admiration for Hitler's aggressive tactics and others who thought of Tojo's predecessor as a symbol of resurgent Asia in revolt against Europe, hardly anyone in India has ever had any sympathy for the fat Dictator of Italy.

One can recall only one solitary local Society lady who, after a visit to Italy, used to go about singing praises of Mussolini as a great patron and admirer of Indian culture. But that was six years ago, and even then no one took her seriously. The only friend in India that Mussolini had up to 1939 was the Anglo-Indian Press, which was following the lead of the reactionary British Press in acclaiming the murderer of Matteotti as a holy crusader against godless Communism.

Yet Mussolini, like all Dictators, did his best to woo Indian public opinion.

In 1932 when Gandhiji was returning from England after attending the Round Table Conference he broke journey in Rome for two days. The Duce immediately sent an invitation to the Mahatma. The report of the interview was never published, but it was said that Mussolini evinced a keen interest in Indian politics and the Gandhian technique of non-violence. It was obvious, however, that the apostle of non-violence and the high priest of violence could find no common ground for agreement.

Then Mussolini explored the cultural field and invited a well-known Indian musician—it was Pandit Onkar Nath, if I remember right—and was duly reported by his publicity boys to have been charmed by the Indian melodies. The 'cultural' angle was further exploited by offering scholarships to Indian students and artists for studies at Italian universities and art academies. But beyond a few minor 'catches' the scheme fizzled out.

It was Abyssinia that completely turned Indian public opinion against Mussolini and Fascist Italy. It was a case of blatant aggression against a weak and defenceless country. It was the latest and most unashamed manifestation of Western Imperialism at work. Indians felt revolted at the jingoistic utterances of Mussolini's son, Vittorio, who openly declared that it gave him tremendous pleasure and a sense of exultation to bomb the unarmed men, women and children of Abyssinia.

It was Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru who in a characteristic gesture of defiance, let Mussolini know that decent Indians did not like to associate with Dictators whose hands were dripping with the blood of helpless people. On his way back from Europe after his wife's death, Nehru had to pass through Rome. When he arrived at his hotel, an important Fascist official met him to convey a cordial invitation from the Duce, who had cancelled all his important engagements to keep himself free to meet the leader from India.

It was an 'honour' which no European or American statesman could have ever refused. But Nehru was made of different stuff. He refused point-blank. No, he would not go to meet the man who had rained bombs and wrought untold havoc on defenceless Abyssinia. One can imagine how the Duce must have fumed and fretted on getting such a defiant refusal to his invitation.

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A Dictator is not only a complex psychological phenomenon in himself but in his perversions and contradictions he sums up and reflects the perversions and contradictions of the masses. He tyrannizes over the people; but it is the people who put him on the pedestal because his voice is an echo, an enlarged and exaggerated echo, of their own. Hitler became Dictator of Germany not merely because of the tortured, frustrated ego in him, but because many in Germany found in him the reflexion of their own tortured, frustrated egos. To remove a Dictator is not enough. If the people are not psychologically reconstructed they will get another Dictator.

What is the future of Italy without Mussolini? Does his fall solve the problem of Italian Fascism. No doubt the

symbol and driving force is gone for the moment, but are we sure another will not take his place?

Let not Mussolinism live on in Italy even after Mussolini has disappeared!

ANOTHER AUGUST 8!

—*August 8*

Today is August 8. Tomorrow is August 9.

It was on this day last year that the historic session of the A.-I. C. C. concluded at Gowalia Tank Maidan, Bombay, by passing what has since come to be known as the 'August 8 Resolution'—also sometimes called the 'Quit India Resolution'!

It was in the early hours of August 9 last year that Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Azad, Pandit Nehru and other Congress leaders were arrested. The political deadlock created by those arrests has yet to be resolved. Much has happened in these twelve months—much to depress us, much to inspire us. Two things, however, have *not* happened.

Mr Churchill has not decided to liquidate the British Empire.

The Indian nationalists have not withdrawn their demand for freedom, for a real National Government.

FIFTH COLUMN

—August 8

What is a Fifth Column? Yes, what is it?

According to the Penguin *Political Dictionary*, it is:

'a term originating from the Spanish War, 1936-1939, when the Nationalists under General Franco attacked the Republicans in four columns from the outside, while their adherents organized uprisings, espionage and sabotage within the Republican ranks. These secret fighters behind the front were styled the "fifth column".'

Is there a Fifth Column in India? I learn on the authority of a reliable foreign journalist now in India that a number of British and American correspondents carried on an exhaustive investigation in Bengal and, on the evidence adduced, concluded that there was no 'Fifth Column' worth mentioning in Bengal. They communicated their findings to a high Government official, who is reported to have agreed with them, adding that that was why Government hardly ever used the term 'Fifth Column' while referring to the work of saboteurs or terrorists.

In Home Member Maxwell's slanderous pamphlet *Congress Responsibility For Disturbances*, the phrase 'Fifth Column' is not used even once, nor is there the slightest evidence that any of the terroristic acts was committed on instructions from the enemy.

But our friends, the Indian Communists, seem to have got the 'Fifth Column' on their brains. Hardly does an issue of their organ, *People's War*, come out without screaming something about this alleged, non-existing 'Fifth Column'. The Communist organ has not stopped at hinting at the existence of a 'Fifth Column'. It has repeatedly identified the 'Fifth Column' with the Forward Bloc and Congress Socialists. This writer is not familiar with any members of the Forward Bloc, but personally knows several Congress Socialists and knows them to be sincere patriots and as strongly anti-Fascist as any Communist. I don't agree with some parts of their policy and programme even as I disagree with some parts of the Communist 'party line'. But it would be

as stupid and vile on my part to call the Congress Socialists 'Fifth Columnists' and 'Agents of Japan' as to call the Communists 'agents of British imperialism'.

Political controversy is inevitable—indeed, necessary—in a democratic society. But to slander one's adversaries as 'Fifth Columnists' and 'traitors'—especially when they have no means of answering back publicly and vindicating their position—is unfair and ungallant, to say the least. It particularly ill behoves the Communists, who, till only recently, were an illegal party, to take advantage of another party's illegality.

As for 'speaking in the name of the Congress', one must, of course, seriously condemn unauthorized statements and interpretations—whether they are anonymous posters and leaflets misrepresenting the Congress creed and programme, or Marxist believers in violent revolution setting themselves up as interpreters and upholders of Gandhian non-violence!

LIBERTY AND LOIN CLOTH

—August 15

Is the wearing of khadi clothes and Gandhi cap a crime?

This question is important because, last Sunday, a number of persons were stopped by policemen, questioned, searched and, in some instances, taken to police stations for no greater offence than the wearing of khadi clothes and Gandhi caps.

A friend of mine was apprehended on the road by some plain-clothes policemen, who said they wanted to search his person and the leather portfolio he was carrying. They had no warrant for the search, not even a uniform to establish their identity as policemen. But they insisted that under the Defence of India Rules they were authorized to search anyone on suspicion. Is it so? I wonder.

In any case, what are the legitimate grounds of suspicion on which a policeman may stop any respectable and law-abiding citizen on the road and insult him by publicly searching his person and belongings there and then?

My friend's bag, when searched, yielded neither a bomb nor bulletins, and nothing more dangerous than a copy of the *People's War* (appealing to people not to take part in *any* demonstrations on August 9, as a procession or a flag salutation might easily lead to Fifth Column sabotage!). So he proceeded to enquire into the *bona fides* of the policemen and the cause of being suspected; he first met a police sergeant at the street corner, and then proceeded to the nearest police station. At the station he was offered polite apologies and was told that *it was his dress that had made him look suspicious in the eyes of the policemen.*

This suspicious dress consisted of khaddar trousers, khaddar *kurta* and Gandhi cap.

And again I ask: Is it an offence under any of the provisions of the Defence of India Rules to put on khaddar clothes and Gandhi cap? If not, why should any citizen be suspected because he goes about in this perfectly innocuous dress?

'Clothes', says the tailor's slogan, 'make the man.' Sometimes they are also the cause of his undoing. There was the Guntur Magistrate, for instance, during the last Civil Disobedience Movement of 1930, who made it illegal to wear a Gandhi cap, and anyone appearing in public with this non-violent head-gear was sure to find himself behind prison bars. It is good that no Magistrate this time has yet banned the wearing of Gandhi caps, otherwise many American soldiers whose head-gear looks suspiciously like a Gandhi cap would have found themselves in trouble.

Yes, clothes make all the difference! They are symbols of the wearer's taste and ideology—though sometimes they may be used as camouflage, too. During the days of the Congress Ministries, many a Governor took pride in purchasing and donning khaddar. And I remember how a colleague travelling Inter Class from Bombay to Delhi by the Frontier Mail found himself the object of flattering attention paid by railway officials and fellow-passengers. At some station a

policeman even saluted him. Later on, he discovered that because of his spotless white khadi *sherwani* and Gandhi cap he was being mistaken for a Congress Minister !

Today the ministers are in jail and their 'uniform' is suspect in the eyes of the law

In India the wearing of a Gandhi cap or khadi clothes may only lead to one's arrest. But in America a person appearing in a particular kind of clothes may cause a riot.

Since writing last about 'zoot-suit riots' in America, I have seen pictures of boys wearing 'zoot-suits' in some American illustrated magazines. Frankly, the 'zoot-suit' looks to me the most comical attire for anyone to affect in this twentieth century. In an extravagantly elongated and loose coat and trousers tucked up at the ends like skiing breaches one looks more like a cartoon than a human being. Yet, I think everyone has a birth-right to appear in whatever ridiculous dress he (or she) chooses, and one can hardly sympathize with those American highbrows to whom the sight of a 'zoot-suit' is like a red rag to a bull. I believe this particular dress has become a symbol of youthful irresponsibility and degeneracy—all 'zoot-suiters' are below 18—and hence the wrathful indignation they arouse in the ultra-moral public.

Personally, I think 'Freedom of Dress' is just as important as 'Freedom of the Press', 'Freedom of Speech' and the rest of the Four Freedoms of President Roosevelt. There is a close relation between political tyranny and dress-dictatorship. Uniformity in clothes may be achieved by suppression of democracy. Mussolini put his people in black shirts and Hitler in brown ones. And look where they ended !

Long live 'zoot-suits', dress suits, morning coats, bush jackets, baggy *shalwars*, cylindrical *tehnads*, *dhoties* and loin cloths, caps, hats and turbans of all the craziest sizes, shapes and colours. For they make for variety and ensure liberty.

AM I GOING MAD ?

—September 5

People are dying in Calcutta—dying of starvation !

Hundreds are being reduced to skeletons in Bijapur.

There are floods and famines, hunger stalks the land, a war—the bloodiest war in history—rages in Europe and Asia, the Soviets are paying with their flesh and blood for every inch of land won back from the Nazi aggressors, the Chinese are in the seventh year of the war against Japan and the soldiers and guerillas of China face Japanese bullets on a handful of rice per day.

But His Highness is playing the Boogie-woogie and all is well with the world !

Shangri-la, the land of hope and eternal youth, where rivers of milk and honey flow, has been discovered at last. It is in India. But it is not for Indians ! And the starving mothers of Calcutta with dried-up breasts cannot feed their dying babies on the milk that flows through the eternally green land of Shangri-la.

A Portuguese navigator set out in search of India. He ended by discovering America, the New World. And a batch of Yankee youths set out to fight the 'People's War' on the borders of India and they ended by discovering Shangri-la, the hitherto mythical land of James Hilton's *Lost Horizon*, the paradise on earth that was a thousand miles from any place, even a thousand miles from nowhere.

Bill Fisher, the completely reliable reporter of *Time-Life-Fortune*, has recorded this great discovery in an article in *Life*. Says Fisher :

' There is one place where the boys' experiences have easily exceeded their wildest dreams. This is in a small Indian state where a repair depot of the Tenth Air Force has been plunked down right in the middle of an atmosphere that is so much along Arabian Nights lines that the boys are still pinching themselves to find out if it is all real.....' .

And by the time you have read through the account of the place and the goings-on, you too, good reader, will be pinching yourself to make sure if it is all real.

The Maharaja, who is handsome and dashing, has 'a high-domed palace, 25 smart motor-cars, 60 elephants and half a million subjects'. (It is not revealed if the subjects own any cars—do they even own themselves?)

The Maharaja is thoroughly democratic. 'He calls the American Captain 'Buck', and Buck calls him 'Chief'. Even the Dowager Maharani is democratic and plays poker with the Yankee boys. Servants in picturesque livery greet the Americans 'with trays of chota pegs from the Maharaja's seemingly inexhaustible cellar'. A bevy of lovely Indian princesses is at hand to entertain the guests—the mechanics and pilots and privates. Democracy marches on!

The Maharaja not only provides banquets, the exquisite dishes served in silver, but has also presented them with ice-cream freezers, a motion-picture projector, and cases of whisky—from the same inexhaustible cellar!

Nor is there any dearth of entertainment. 'His Highness is a great admirer of swing, jitterbugs and boogie-woogie', and has a collection of American gramophone records.

And thus life goes on in Shangri-la—'with coloured birds fluttering around in the branches', and 'huge flowering shrubs perfume the air'—and any moment you expect Dorothy Lamour to come out!

Can this be true? It must be true, for Bill Fisher is a reliable reporter. Then those other reports must be all wrong—the women and children dying of starvation in Calcutta, the hunger-bitten of Bijapur! Are those pictures published in the *Statesman* and the *Patrika* faked? Or is Shangri-la an illusion? Can babies be crying for milk in Calcutta and an inexhaustible cellar serving out a river of whisky in Shangri-la? Can people be dying on the roadside while, not far away, coloured birds flutter around and flowering shrubs perfume the air? Which picture is true, and which false? Coloured birds or dying babies, rivers of whisky or children clutching at dried-up breasts, perfumed air or the stink of death rising from decaying corpses? Am I going mad? Or do I live in a mad world?

THE HUNGRY DO NOT SLEEP

—September 18

'Man does not live by bread alone!'

No, he does not. He can live by eating rice, too. If there is no rice available, he can eat gruel, if no gruel, he can boil roots and tree leaves and eat them, he can hunt for food in the dustbins. That is what a number of persons are doing in Calcutta. When even the dustbins are empty, they just lie down on the road and die.

Yesterday I starved—a little! Missed my morning breakfast because I got up too late and had to rush to catch the 9-20 bus. Missed my lunch in the rush of office work. In the evening I had a meeting and, thanks to overcrowded buses and trams, reached home at midnight and went to sleep without waking up the household.

But I could not sleep. You cannot sleep if you are hungry. The whole system seems to protest, and things turn and twist and squirm inside you. So I lay awake and thought of this and that—but mainly of food and the lack of food.

And inevitably my mind flew to Calcutta where so many starve, not because they missed their meals in the rush of work, but because They Have No Work! No work and no food! And for them it is not an accident on one day. They must starve, day after day, helplessly, hopelessly starve. Starve to death!

If I cannot sleep though I have had at least six cups of tea in the day what about those people in Calcutta? They get no cups of tea to sustain them. They have no soft beds to lie upon. Then how do they sleep? Do they ever sleep at all? To the poor and the distressed sleep is the only luxury they can afford. When that too is denied to them, what chance of life is left? It must be one long agony. Agony piled upon agony.

I switch on the light and try to read, but hunger makes it impossible to concentrate. Words swim before one's eyes. I pick up a paper. It is *People's War*, the organ of the Communist Party. I like the Communists, but I disagree with them. Their analysis is correct, but their conclusions

are wrong. I glance at the front page. 'Queues of Death'—Somnath Lahri's report on the starvation situation in Calcutta. In words of fire he writes of the agony and the suffering, the indignity and humiliation of people starving to death

'.....A dead body rotting on the ground under the shade of a tree. Flies buzzing on its face. Apparently uncared for and left to the wind and the rain.....'

Bodies, dead bodies, just lying like that!

And he quotes a letter from Faridpur, in the interior of Bengal:

'Here at Gosairhat a starving boy was lying in the bazar for some days. Hunger had made him unable to move. A jackal came up in the night and bit off half of his right foot. He lay half-dead there, like that, for several days more, nobody cared to remove him. Last night, the jackal prowled in again and ate up his hands, legs, entrails—all. His feeble cry reached no one. Early comers to the bazar found the half-eaten corpse next morning.'

And I feel something viciously nibbling at my own foot. No, it is not a jackal, just a cockroach attracted by the light. So I read on till I reach the bitter end:

'.....We pass by the burning *ghats* (cremation grounds). Here too there are queues—but not of the living. A dead body burning in each fire and rows of others waiting in a long queue—awaiting their turn for burning. The *hari* (fire-man) cannot cope with its harvest of the dead.

'We trek back to the city. Our tired, shuffling feet. The tired, shuffling feet of myriads of men. Gaunt men and women with emaciated children, sucking at the dry breasts of the mother. There is no milk there. It is blood that the babies are sucking. And they cough out blood, shudder for a moment and then lie still on the footpath—a corpse.....

'From far and from near they pour in like nomadic hordes. A whole class, a whole people, uprooted from its soil, wandering in the primordial quest for food.....

'And the queues of death. Before the controlled shop on the footpaths, near the stations, inside the tumble-down huts of the *bustee*, even in the flats of the lower middle class. All awaiting their turn. From two meals to one meal. From one meal to starvation. From starvation to the footpath and the dustbin. And then slink away to a corner in the blacked-out night, to drop off and die.....'

I pick up another paper and read that while the poor starve on the pavements, the expensive restaurants of

Calcutta offer you a choice of 30 courses for dinner. And yet another paper. The Calcutta Corporation, I read, has at last held a meeting after four meetings had been called and had dispersed without doing anything about the starvation problem. One had no quorum and the other three were adjourned as a mark of respect for the memory of prominent people recently dead. Dead people! If the Corporation is to adjourn every time a man dies, then it will not be able to meet at all. For people are daily dying by the dozen in Calcutta. But I forget. They are not prominent, distinguished, rich people. They are poor, dispossessed, famished peasants. Whoever thought of adjourning—or convening—a Corporation meeting on their deaths!

I read on. Poona Races. Special trains for First and Second Class passengers. Travel if you must. Wagon shortage. Punjab wheat is lying at stations for lack of transport facilities. Can't they fill a dozen First and Second Class bogies with grain and send them to Calcutta? It's a comic idea, you say. Even more comic than people dying for lack of grain, grain rotting a thousand miles away for lack of wagons, and wagons being used for transport of race-horses? I think of the Yankee soldiers' Shangri-la where rivers of whisky flow. I think of the starving babies of Calcutta. And I recall Mr Amery's words that Indians are over-eating owing to inflation. I think of the boy eaten by a jackal and wonder whether Mr Amery meant the jackals are over-eating.....

We are supposed to be doing a fine job of collecting relief. Drop a coin in the collection box and your heart glows with pride and self-righteousness. So many annas given, so many stomachs filled. But it is already too late—at least in many cases. A friend who has come from Calcutta tells me that after days of starvation when a man gets a bowl of gruel at a free kitchen often his system is so upset that he cannot digest what he eats and with the slightest over-eating, nausea and diarrhoea follow. Starving to death is a slow process, but cholera kills swiftly. The problem of Bengal's starving population will not be solved—merely by a bowl of gruel or *Khichdi*.

And what about those (of whom, too, I hear) who prefer to die rather than accept charity? We are no

beggars,' they protest when told to go to the free kitchens. 'Give us work and wages, and shops where we can buy our own grain.' But it is easier to give an anna or a rupee or even a thousand rupees in charity than to change an economic system that naturally begets famines and starvation. Men and women and children are dying today because yesterday any one with pots of money could buy thousands of tons of wheat or rice and store it for his private gain and then give a few thousands in charity and be known as a patriot and philanthropist.

FRIENDS OF THE SOVIET

—November 14

If you are a young Leftist, you must learn to talk in initials. Something like this: The B.S.U. and the F.S.U. were going to hold a joint meeting at the G.K.U. office, but it seems at the same time the I.P.T.A. and the P.W.A. are rehearsing a play provided, of course, the C.S.P. and the R.S.D. deviationists do not create confusion as they did at the A.I.T.U.C. and the A.I.S.F. sessions.

At the moment we are concerned only with one of these organizations: the F.S.U. or, in less ideological language, the Friends of the Soviet Union. Of all the non-party organizations that owe their origin to the inspiration of the Communists, the F.S.U. is undoubtedly one of the most active and the most popular. Its activities are admittedly very commendable inasmuch as it seeks to spread correct information about the Soviet Union through pamphlets, posters, lectures and exhibitions. It has branches in most important cities and towns, and publishes a weekly paper, *The Indo-Soviet Journal*, from Calcutta.

The membership of the Friends of the Soviet Union comprises not only Communists, Socialists and Congressites,

but strangely enough, also Hindu Sabhaites, Muslim Leaguers, landlords, capitalists, communalists, etc. This is, indeed, a paradox. And one wonders: are these people *naïve* enough not to know what friendship of the Soviet Union implies, or are they *clever* enough to know that even sympathy with the Soviet Union can be exploited for their reactionary purposes?

Of course, the days are gone when people thought of the Soviet Union as the frightening 'Red Bogey' in terms of baby-killing and 'nationalization' of women. Today, the Soviets have been accepted—reluctantly, though, in many quarters—as members of civilized human society. And yet can one afford to forget that there are certain definite political, social and economic values and concepts for which the U.S.S.R. stands. These include socialization and collective ownership of land and other means of production, abolition of landlordism and capitalism, curtailment (if not complete suppression) of the power of organized religion, complete equality of sexes, employment of women in industry and agriculture, secularization of political life, equality of opportunity irrespective of religion, birth and sex.

Differences on methods and details are possible. But no genuine friend of the Soviet Union has differed with the fundamental objectives of the Russian Revolution.

If today the Soviet Union has become the symbol and focal centre of the hope and faith of the toiling masses of the world, it is because of these facts, *not merely because the Soviets are fighting the Nazis*. After all Britain and America are fighting the Nazis, too, yet no one has so far thought of starting an organization called 'Friends of the British Empire' or 'Friends of the United States'. Friends of the British Empire! Sounds like a joke, doesn't it?

Here is the message sent by the solitary member of the Congress Working Committee at the moment out of jail—Mrs Sarojini Naidu—which is so eloquent and so significant that I make no apology for quoting it here in full:

'The great leaders of India are still in prison and cannot greet you, o valiant people! The high privilege, therefore devolves on me to send you, in the name of India, a message of goodwill and gratitude on the twenty-sixth anniversary of that memorable day of travail and triumph that witnessed the birth of a new Russia.

‘With eyes of pride and wonder we have watched the miracle of your magnificent achievements in a brief quarter century which, in the history of human progress, counts as but a single pulse-beat of Time

‘With the blood and tears of your supreme sacrifice, your unconquerable hope and invulnerable faith in your own destiny, you have built, out of the ruins of a shattered Empire, a splendid new world of Democracy. You took the broken wagon of your peasants and hitched it to the star of freedom; you gathered the trampled clay of humanity and shaped an invincible legion of heroes who, today, are the defenders and guardians of the world’s liberty and civilization

‘To India, as to other countries in the throes of struggle to attain national independence, your unrivalled example is a radiant beacon of inspiration. We salute you, o people of Russia, and offer you the homage of our love and praise’

We only hope the message does reach Russia, and that it is duly translated to Comrade Stalin, so he knows that Churchill and Roosevelt are not the only ‘friends of the Soviet Union’. There are other friends and *better* friends.

BENGAL—1943

—December 26

Two artists—one with a sketch-book and the other with a camera—went to Bengal and have brought back a horrifyingly vivid record of what they saw in that unhappy province.

Chittaprasad’s black-and-white sketches and Sunil’s photographs are being exhibited by the Communist Party at their Red Flag Hall. A visit to this exhibition is an experience at once disturbing and instructive.

The dead and the dying lying by the roadside—the ‘queues of death’ at the cremation grounds where rows of

corpses must wait for hours before they are cremated—starving children reduced to skeletons—young women who dare not look at the camera because of the shame of having had to sell their honour to feed themselves and their starving babies—miserable half-dead bodies lying in hospitals—crowds at the gruel kitchens waiting patetically for a charity meal. That was 'Bengal—1943'. And it is good that these two socially-conscious artists have recorded the tragedy. Let us all look at these pictures, look at them and stare at them. Let each horrible image be permanently imprinted on our minds. Let us then swear. 'Never, never will we allow such a thing to happen again!'

There is one particular photograph in this exhibition that deserves to be seen as a symbol and summing-up of the tragedy of Bengal. It is the photograph of a young girl, barely 14, with regular attractive features. Her eyes are downcast. She confessed to having sold her honour, like thousands of others. Today she is lying in a hospital, writhing with agony, her young body contaminated by a shameful disease. In a delirious state she was heard to mutter something like, 'Forgive me, my sisters, for my sins and dishonour,' which someone took down and a translation of it in simple English verse is hung along with the photograph. As you read these words and see her downcast face in the photograph you feel like crying aloud, 'No, no, sister. What you did was not shameful. That we, the people of India, your brothers, allowed such a thing to happen was shameful. Don't ask for forgiveness. Forgive *us* sister, if you can!'

Appropriately enough, there is only one picture in colours, in the entire exhibition. It is the only hopeful picture—a painting of the ripened golden harvest, the *Aman* crop waiting to be reaped.

The exhibition is timely and must be seen. The Communist Party has rendered a public service by organizing it. But here is one suggestion to the organizers: Please don't disturb the visitors by 'Party Line' lectures while they are looking at the pictures. Chittaprasad's harsh and grim sketches and Sunil's realistic photographs need no explanations beyond the simple titles already attached to the pictures. It is an exhibition of grim reality. It should be seen

in sepulchral silence, when each visitor should be allowed to come face to face with his own conscience. If necessary, when visitors come out they can be given leaflets explaining the Communist attitude to the Bengal situation. But half a dozen enthusiastic young 'Red' propagandists rattling away the 'party line' in half a dozen languages only provoke the non-Communist visitors into a defensive hostile attitude.

The tragedy and shame of Bengal belongs to us all. Let us not make political capital out of our heritage of horrors. And this applies to all—the Hindu Mahasabhaite, the Muslim Leaguer, the Congressman *and* the Communist!

1944

.....When the Second Front was opened
in Europe. But (Thanks to Mr Jinnah)
failed to open in India.

'NAUGHTY GIRL OF INDIA'

—February 13

'On the 65th of this month, we hear you are celebrating your thirteenth birthday!'

That is how an irreverent young reporter wanted to greet Mrs Sarojini Naidu when she arrived in Bombay. At the last minute, however, he got funky and said something about *ras-goolas* instead.

Being even more irreverent, and safe behind the protective armour of anonymity, the *Chronicle* now repeats his words. For, there was more in these words than an attempt to be funny. Mrs Naidu is as charming today, on her 65th birthday, as the sweetest thirteen-year-old. And slightly to vary the compliment that Ethel Mannin once paid to Bertrand Russell, one may say that merely to talk to Sarojini Naidu is more fascinating than to make love to almost any other woman. It must be about her that the poet said:

*Age cannot wither nor custom stale
Her infinite variety.*

Happy birthday to you, charming young lady! Many, many, many happy returns of the day!

* * * *

Sarojini Naidu is more than a person. She is more than a leader even. She is an institution. She is a landmark of modern India. She is one of the makers of an era in Indian History. The recent Government ban on her speeches and statements shows that even the Bureaucrats and the Imperialists are not unaware of her importance and her influence.

Patriot, poetess, politician, orator, hostess, jail-bird, heart-breaker and housewife, inspirer of the multitude, maker of rhymes and upholder of reason, dreamer of dreams and the disturber of a nation's sleep, idol of the millions and iconoclast—many and varied roles she has played during the 65 years of her life. She has more than a man's courage and yet she is feminine to the core; she can discuss politics, poetry and the pattern of a *sari* with equal facility. Her love of gossip is only next to her love of the freedom of her country. She is a heroine. And yet she is intensely human.

She loves to tell stories about people, including herself—even against herself!

She will tell you, for instance, how (many years ago) she was once introduced by the sedate Chairman of a meeting (if I remember right, in South Africa) as the 'Naughty Girl of India'—meaning, of course, the 'Nightingale of India'!

The title 'Nightingale of India' (or *Bulbul-e-Hind*) has adorned her from the days of her youth when her poetry had revealed to the world the beauty and rhythm of Indian life, as also the yearnings and aspirations of the Indian people.

Not only her poetry but also her prose shows the remarkable extent to which she has mastered the English language. When she went abroad, they were amazed at her power of eloquence. When she speaks it is like music—now soothing, now sweet, now inspiring, now rising to a crescendo in an angry denunciation of the ungodly and the unjust.

Next only to her eloquence comes her remarkable sense of humour. In her company there is never a dull moment. Her sparkling conversation is guaranteed to chase the bluest of 'blues' away, and she has the uncanny sixth sense of the perfect hostess to know how to put each one of her guests—whether a celebrity or a young student—at ease. When she used to live in Bombay, her suite at the Taj was the meeting ground of all nations of the world, where at one and the same time one could meet American journalists, European authors and artists, Indian Nawabs and Maharajas, political leaders, Socialists, Communists, Trade Union workers, students, film stars, musicians. In the midst of this remarkable conglomeration, she held court—a Queen, indeed, crowned by her own glory and adorned by the jewel of her wit!

But every now and then the 'Nightingale of India' would be shut up in a cage—whenever the path of patriotism led prisonwards! But even in jail she never lost her sense of humour and her love of life, and her company was the delight of all her fellow-prisoners. Since August 9, she had been kept in detention at the Aga Khan's bungalow in Poona along with Gandhiji and Kasturba, and it is well known that it was she who all along ran that establishment. When Gandhiji undertook his epic fast she nursed and served him with the devotion of a sister or daughter. Of all the Congress leaders, she is the only one who dares exchange pleasantries with

Gandhiji and talk to him with affectionate ‘disrespect’. Only she could take the liberty of nicknaming him ‘Our Mickey Mouse of India’. Not even the Mahatma is safe when shafts of her wit are flying around. She once told Jawaharlal Nehru: ‘Jawahar, don’t think all these young women who come to hear your speeches are converts to Socialism. They only want to look at your handsome face.’

Mrs Naidu once called Mr. Jinnah ‘the Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity’. Those were the days when the tall young lawyer was foremost in the ranks of the fighters for unity and freedom. How far in his later life, he has lived up to the great title conferred upon him need not be discussed here. But there is no doubt that in her own life and outlook, Mrs Naidu has herself proved the most striking symbol of Hindu-Muslim Unity. In her the two streams of culture have met—as they have met in cultural synthesis of her country.

Not by accident but by deliberate choice, she has assimilated all that is best in the two religions and their philosophies and literatures, allowing no prejudice to bar the doors of her home or the doors of her mind and heart. Before me lies a copy of the collection of her poems, *The Sceptred Flute*, and I find in it such poems as ‘Humayun to Zubeida’, ‘Song of Zeb-un-Nissa’, ‘Royal Tomb of Golconda’, ‘A Persian Love Song’, ‘The Imam Bara’ and ‘The Prayer of Islam’, along with ‘Damayanti to Nala’, ‘To a Buddha’, ‘A Rajput Love Song’, ‘The Temple’ and ‘Kali the Mother’. This universality of poetic interest is only symbolic of her sterling nationalism which is unsullied by the slightest trace of religious bigotry or communalism. No wonder she retains the friendship and trust of even the staunchest Muslim Leaguers.

She is essentially a poet, but the freedom movement pulled her out of her ivory tower and landed her in the hurly-burly of political life. And yet she has retained her poetic vision and her womanly grace and, to a large extent, succeeded in softening and mellowing the political atmosphere by the charm of her personality. She has influenced several generations of Indians, given an impetus to the movement for women’s emancipation, and her speeches have inspired many an idealistic youth to throw himself into the struggle for freedom.

Her political career is a part of the history of modern India. But it is not generally known that she has often served as a sort of 'roving ambassador' of the Indian nation. She once styled herself 'a wandering poet'. But the wandering she has done has been in the cause of her country's freedom.

In 1924, she toured throughout the colonies of East and South Africa on a political mission on behalf of the Indian settlers. When she was in South Africa, General Hertzog enquired why her countrymen did not repatriate to their native land. She retorted: 'I might as well ask why you Hollanders in South Africa don't return to the Netherlands.'

During her visit to London to attend the Round Table Conference, she addressed a large number of meetings on India's demand for independence. From England she went to America on a lecture tour and charmed the entire continent by her eloquent advocacy of India's cause and did much to counteract the vicious poison spread by Katherine Mayo's infamous book *Mother India*. Referring to this trip, she said:

'The moment my boat arrived I was set upon by the live-wire American reporters, who all screamed at me, "What do you think of Katherine Mayo?" I replied, "Katherine Mayo? Who is she?" I think that was her fittest epitaph!'

The Indian nation set the seal upon Sarojini Naidu's charter of fame when she was elected President of the Indian National Congress in 1925. It was a historic session over which she presided, as it was at Cawnpore that the Congress came out with a direct challenge to Imperialism. Since then she has been in the forefront of the political struggle and an indispensable member of the councils of the nation's leadership.

It is only in India that a woman can hold such a position. In no so-called emancipated country of the West can a Sarojini Naidu rise to the highest position in the political leadership. It is inconceivable that a woman will ever become the Prime Minister of England or the President of the United States of America.

In the opinion of this writer, there is no doubt whatsoever that Mrs Sarojini Naidu is the greatest woman of the present age. Compare her with all the other prominent women of the world—and you have to concede her to be

the greatest of them all. Mrs. Roosevelt, Madame Chiang Kai-shek, even Madame Sun Yat-sen—each of these undoubtedly great women owes her eminent position in a large measure to the status of her husband. In the Soviet Union, while many women have contributed to the success of the Revolution and the reconstruction, and are today contributing towards victory against the Nazis, yet none of them has individually distinguished herself in the same decisive manner as Stalin or Kalinin or Molotov. But Sarojini Naidu has shown to the world that a woman can, by sheer dint of her own ability and personality, and without in the least basking in the reflected glory of her husband, rise to the highest position in her country.

This is as much a tribute to Mrs. Naidu personally as to the liberating and constructive forces released by the freedom movement in India. It is only against this flaming background of struggle and service and sacrifice that the heroic figure of Sarojini Naidu can be seen in its correct perspective.

A NATION MOURNED HER DEATH

—February 27

'I can no more describe my feeling for Hinduism than for my own wife. She moves me as no other woman in the world can. Not that she has no faults: I dare say she has many more than I see myself. But the feeling of an indissoluble bond is there.....'

'No other woman had any attraction for me in the same sense that my wife had. I was too loyal to her as a husband and too loyal to the vow I had taken before my mother to be a slave to any other woman.'

This is what the husband wrote about his wife—the wife who, alas, is no more!

And this is what the brave wife said in a press statement on the arrest of her husband in 1922:

'My dear Countrymen and Countrywomen,

'My dear husband has been sentenced today to six years' simple imprisonment. While I cannot deny that this heavy sentence has to some extent told upon me, I have consoled myself with the thought that it is beyond our powers to reduce that sentence and release him by our own exertions long before his term of imprisonment is over.

'I have no doubt that, if India wakes up and seriously undertakes to carry out the Constructive Programme of the Congress, we shall succeed not only in releasing him, but also in solving to our satisfaction all the three issues for which we have been fighting and suffering for the last eighteen months or more.

'The remedy, therefore, lies with us. If we fail, the fault will be ours. I, therefore, appeal to all men and women who feel for me and have regard for my husband wholeheartedly to concentrate on the Constructive Programme and make it a success.'

Kasturba is dead. Long live Kasturba! For she was much more than merely the wife of a great man—the greatest man of the modern world. She was a humble, meek, unsophisticated housewife transformed into a gallant fighter for freedom as much by the influence of her husband as by the impact of those titanic revolutionary forces of which her husband is the symbol and the spearhead.

Kasturba was herself a symbol, a symbol of the new womanhood of India—of all those women who came out of centuries-old seclusion and, shedding their traditional timidity, took their place in the vanguard of the non-violent army of India's liberation.

By family tradition, temperament and upbringing none was psychologically remoter from the tumult and turmoil of politics than the shy young girl who married Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. And yet when the call came, she renounced (not without a struggle) the peace and privacy of domestic life, the pleasures of conjugal relationship, the deep religious convictions about caste and untouchability, the conservative, domesticated girl's instinctive revulsion from public life. What more could a woman sacrifice? Jail became a second home to Kasturba, she forgot to count how many times her husband and sons were taken away and imprisoned. She led women's defiant processions in the face of the threat of lathi-charges. And she renounced her husband, learning to share him with the entire nation. But her devotion to him remained as firm as ever. In her heart

and her mind the personality of her husband and the cause of her country's freedom were indissolubly merged. While serving the one, she served the other, too.

A TRAIN LEAVES FOR 'NOWHERE'

—March 5

The official hush-hush over the whereabouts of the members of the Congress Working Committee has at last been broken—after exactly 18 months!

In reply to a question asked by Sardar Mangal Singh in the Central Assembly, the Home Member said, 'The members of the Working Committee are detained in Ahmednagar.'

This is a historic statement, for it officially lifts for the first time the curtain of mystery that has been deliberately kept hanging to keep the national leaders' place of detention a secret. And I am not yet sure that the Home Member did not reveal the secret in a moment of absent-mindedness!

Not that it ever was really a secret. I know it, you knew it, every one knew it. But you were not supposed to know it. And, of course, you were not supposed to publish it.

Strangely enough, it was only an American paper, the *Time* news-magazine, that published a cabled report that the Congress leaders were detained in Ahmednagar fort, along with a detailed description of the place of detention. But thereby hangs a tale which, thanks to the Home Member, can now be told in full, and I have pleasure in telling it, for I played a little part in it myself.

Let's go back to that fateful midnight of August 8-9, 1942.

Journalists have already recorded at length the exciting atmosphere that prevailed that night in newspaper offices as, melodramatically, it was discovered that the telephone lines had gone 'dead' all over Bombay.

A different scene, but equally animated, was being enacted simultaneously at the Victoria Terminus Station. The last train was gone, the station building was practically deserted except for a few sleepy-eyed officials tabulating the day's accounts after closing the booking-windows.

On one of the platforms, however, a train was being got ready—a special train! Only a few bogies and an engine—and a dining car! But no one knew—not even the Driver or the Guard—the destination of the train, when it would leave, and who would travel by it! The dining car waiters were as puzzled by the hush-hush atmosphere of the goings-on as the railway officials.

'Who is going by this special?' asked one of the railway officials. 'And when is it leaving?'

'I don't know, Sir,' replied the waiter, 'but we have been asked to keep breakfast ready for about 20 persons.'

'Must be military officers,' commented the railway official, starting to go away. He was sleepy and tired.

'May be,' philosophically observed the waiter, 'but I wonder why the military officers should require vegetarian meal.'

And next morning, as the railway official got up and learnt of the Congress leaders' arrests, he knew how he had missed a 'scoop' in the night!

When the train actually steamed out at 7-30 a. m. no one was allowed to enter the platform, not even the station building. By then word had got round, of course, that Gandhiji and the members of the Working Committee had been arrested. A small crowd that had collected even at that early misty hour in front of the Bori Bunder station, saw a few cars with police escorts driving in. There was a whistle, a rattle, and the train pulled out of the station—for 'an unspecified destination'! That is how the newspapers and news agencies reported it—or, rather, were allowed to report it! For, within a few hours, by the exercise of their amazing journalistic sixth sense, most of the reporters knew the leaders were being taken to Ahmednagar. But, they were not allowed to say it.

Meanwhile, in a flat on Pedder Road, Bill Fisher of *Time* and *Life* slept soundly and peacefully, having worked till late at night on a long 'story' about the A. I. C. C. meet-

A TRAIAN LEAVES 'FOR NOWHERE'

ing that he had cabled to New York *via* his London office. It was nearly ten when the telephone in his flat started working again and he got a ring from me. Poor Bill! He almost collapsed when he learnt that while he had been sleeping, the curtain had been rung down on the most exciting political drama in the history of modern India.

'You are a good friend,' he growled at me, 'letting me sleep while all this was happening. In heaven's name, why didn't you ring me earlier?'

I told him the telephone lines had been 'dead' for hours, and he appreciated the situation.

Within an hour, Bill Fisher was on the scent,—like the trained news-hound that he is. He drove down to our office, after sending a brief cable giving the bare facts of the arrests.

'But tell me,' he asked, 'where have they been taken?'

I told him our information was that they had been taken to Ahmednagar, but that we could not divulge the news, as all reports about the arrests had to pass the censors. He said he would take a chance with cable censors.

I do not know how it happened, but Bill Fisher's cable about the Congress leaders having been taken to Ahmednagar and the detailed description and history of Ahmednagar Fort did pass the censor. Later, other foreign correspondents tried to send out the same news, but, meanwhile, the censors had got wise and clamped down on the Ahmednagar part of their 'stories'.

And thus it came to be that Bill Fisher 'scooped' over all his rivals and millions of readers of *Time* in America read all about Ahmednagar Fort in the next issue of the famous news-magazine—the same issue which bore Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's portrait on the cover. The copies of this issue, however, were not allowed to reach *Time* subscribers in India!

Secret, the *Times of India Directory of Bombay City and*
and the *ency* (1936 edition) devotes only five lines to the town
Purchas
Officers

mednagar, the headquarters of the District, figured that inherently in the Duke of Wellington's Indian campaigns. The

On itself is unattractive, but there is a fine fort, half a mile to cars, but it is of the City. Ahmednagar is a station on the Dhond-d line of the Great Indian Peninsula Railway. There is a clerks—mavellers' bungalow.'

This brief description, however, leaves out several interesting historical facts about Ahmednagar and Ahmednagar Fort. Ahmednagar was the seat of one of the rulers of the powerful Bahmini dynasty which ruled over the Deccan, used as a concentration camp for the prisoners of the Boer War. During the last war German prisoners were interned there. Not long ago it is said to have been used to house the Italian prisoners-of-war who were brought to India after the fall of Eritrea and Tripoli.

A future historian of India might devote considerably more than five lines to sum up the historical significance of Ahmednagar. One visualizes some such paragraph in the *The Directory of Bombay City and Presidency* (1956 edition):

Ahmednagar—capital of the District of that name in the Bombay Deccan, has figured prominently in Indian history. It was the seat of the Bahmini kings and, during the expansionist phase of British imperialism in India, it was conquered by the Duke of Wellington in one of his series of campaigns. Half a mile from the town is a fine fort which was supposed to be impregnable when constructed. During British rule this fort was used for the accommodation of a series of different kinds of war prisoners the most famous of whom were the leaders of the Nationalist movement, including Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who were all arrested in Bombay on August 9, 1942, and brought to Ahmednagar. Their presence in Ahmednagar Fort was kept a secret for 18 months until the Home Member of the then British Government announced the fact in the Legislative Assembly. They were kept detained in Ahmednagar for—years till their release on—following a settlement of the Indo-British political deadlock

History will fill the blanks!

NEW DELHI ROUND-THE-CLOCK

—March 12

Eight A. M.—From across the sleepy, sluggish stream of the Jumna, the sun rose in the east, piercing the bluish late winter mist which clung to the low ridge surrounding the ancient capital, the ridge from where Nicholson's artillery pounded the city wall in 1857 and thus won the Battle of India for the British.

The sun, in its morning majesty, surveyed the ruins of all the seven Delhis—Indraprastha, the Fort of Ferozeshah, Humayun's tomb, Shahjehan's Red Fort.

A sprightly ray darted towards Chandni Chowk, lightly touched the golden dome of the Pearl Mosque, ricocheted on to the slim minarets of the Juma Masjid, and from there travelled due south, vaulting over the congested city following the asphalt Kingsway, finally landed smack on the towering dome of the Viceregal Palace. New Delhi awoke to a new day!

Nine A. M.—In the pallor of morning light, the dull, squat and undistinguished 'squares', bungalows and tenements spread over an immense plain looked even duller, squatter and more undistinguished than usual. Looked at from a high-soaring aeroplane, New Delhi looked like a series of ant-heaps.

From these ant-heaps emerged an army of ants—at least they could have looked like ants, seen from our hypothetical aeroplane! These were the clerks, the head clerks, the stenographers, the P. A.s, the Section Officers, the Superintendents, the Deputy Assistant Secretaries, the Deputy Secretaries, the Assistant and Joint Secretaries, the Advisers and the Experts, the Directors and the Controllers, the Purchase Officers, the Supply Officers, the Propaganda Officers and other species of the Bureaucrat and the Clerk that inhabit New Delhi.

On foot, in a few (very rare!) buses, in tongas and in cars, but mostly on bicycles, this army of ants—sorry, clerks—moved in disorderly formation, converging finally

on the colossal pile of red-stone that is the Imperial Secretariat.

Ten A M.—Thousands upon thousands of these 'Babus' and Bureaucrats trooped through the huge doorway of the Secretariat (North Block) which is the hub of this little universe. But hardly any one of them cared to look up and read the legend engraved in stone :

Liberty will not descend to a people, a people must rise themselves to liberty; it is a blessing that must be earned before it can be enjoyed.

Even if they had read the inscription, it would not have meant much to them. They are trying to raise themselves not to liberty but to higher grades and salaries and the only blessing they care to earn is the blessing of their Boss.

Eleven A. M.—A hundred thousand heads were bowed over desks and tables in the various offices of New Delhi. Bells rang, typewriters clicked, Big Bosses dictated 'notes' to their P. A.s and stenographers, Superintendents shouted at clerks, clerks sighed helplessly, colourfully-dressed peons flitted in and out with bulky files, thousands of applicants—would-be clerks!—nervously walked down the miles and miles of labyrinthine corridors in search of some particular office, in search of any job.

Memsahibs came out of their prim, flower-bordered bungalows, and went to Connaught Place for a bit of 'shopping'. Petrol is scarce, taxis there are none, so some of them rode on bicycles, others drove in 'dog-carts' driven by pigmy horses, the latest novelty introduced to solve the transport problem in New Delhi, where conveyances are few and distances vast.

Mrs Theka Singh, wife of a Government Contr. ^{Officer}, went into a silk store to buy a new sari for the evening's dance at the club. (Last year her husband could not buy her even a Calico print sari.)

Mrs Ghulam-e-Qadeem, wife of a Civilian, drove her own limousine to order some confectionery for the evening party she was giving on her emerald-green lawn.

Mrs Sarkarka Sewak, wife of a Deputy Assistant Joint Secretary in the Department of Non-Essential Supplies, ordered her uniformed chauffeur to drive her to a beauty

parlour in Connaught Place. She was getting f'xious about the smartly-upholstered WAC (I)s—and about her husband!

Twelve Noon.—The shadow of the Viceregal Lodge had crept under it as the armed sentries paced up and down, so many paces, left-right-left, right about turn, left-right-left.

The Superintendents went in with the files to the Burra Sahib, the clerks relaxed in their pen-pushing zeal, typists gave a moment's respite to their machines, hungry eyes were focussed on the women stenographers.

Bells rang, gorgeously-dressed peons in red-and-gold flitted, soft-footed, in the cool, semi-dark corridors, files went 'up', files went 'down', letters were put in files, files were 'filed', if not shelved. Priority slips were pinned on to files with thorns instead of pins (Metal Economy!), Deputy Secretaries spent several foolscap sheets to prepare drafts of memos and then got the final one typed on the back of a used envelope (Don't Waste Paper).

One P.M.—The ant-heaps disgorged the army of ants—in search of food. The lunch-hour exodus started. The Big Bosses drove home in their cars, the Lesser Bosses had their tiffin-carriers opened by their peons on tables specially provided for the purpose in their own rooms.

All over New Delhi, a swarm of uniformed servicemen and service-women—British, American, Chinese, Army, Navy, Air Force W. A. C.s, W. R. N. S., and Red Cross—pedalled heartily on their way to lunch. The lucky WAC or 'WREN' whizzed past in a jeep to be entertained to luncheon by some optimistic officer.

Clerks, meanwhile, raided the Secretariat canteens and cafeterias—different for Hindus and Muslims and all the other different religions and castes of India! The lesser-paid species swarmed out to get a bite from some tuck-shop or fruit vendor, they ate a couple of *puris*, drank a lot of water, complained of life in general, and their superiors in particular, and dreamt of promotion. The Hindus said the Muslim Superintendent was standing in the way of their success, the Muslims blamed the Hindu Deputy Secretary. Together, they cursed the white-skinned Secretary and talked in hushed, awed tones about H. M. (Hon'ble Member). Contractors, prowling round the Supply Department, hurried to contact the right clerks, head clerks and Superintendents.

Two P. M.—The clerks rushed back to their desks punctually at the specified time. The Superintendents walked in, ten minutes later. The Deputy Secretaries strolled in leisurely at half past two and resumed their philosophic contemplation of the holy files. The Secretaries were still 'away for lunch' as the clock struck.....

Three P. M.—The shadow of the Secretariat fell over the Council Chamber.

In the Assembly the interminable Budget debate went on.

The proteins and the carbohydrates, the acids and the starches, fought each other in the distinguished well-filled stomachs.

An air of sleepy languor hung over the Chamber. Members, under cover of their desks, unloosened their tight belts, relaxed, spread their legs on the comfortable, well-sprung, cushioned 'benches'. The Hon'ble Member for Shops and Stores snored on his seat, oblivious of the dreary debate. The Nominated Members read cinema advertisements in the local papers, the Official Members had their files brought by their Secretaries and disposed of the day's work right there. The Muslim Leaguers thought dreamily of the Pakistan issue in relation to the Budget—or of the Budget in relation to Pakistan—while the Mahasabhaites were alert for the slightest attempt on the part of the Finance Member to deflate the money-bags of 'Hindustan'. The Independents showed their independence by solving crossword puzzles while the Unattached Members remained supremely unattached to the issues of the debate. Meanwhile, a Member continued to speak from written notes in a sing-song voice and a very un-Oxford accent—and the only people who listened to him were the official stenographers.

A mile, as the crow flies, from the Council Chamber another and livelier Parliament was holding its sitting in (of all places) a girls' college. The stomachs on parade were no less distinguished—in fact some of them were record-breakers—but, for gentlemen of their dimensions, they displayed remarkable agility. They made it apparent that they were not going to sleep in a moment of crisis! This was the annual session of the Federation of Indian Merchants' Chambers and one could veritably hear the money-bags jingle

in every phrase of every prepared speech read out in tones and accents better suited for Share Bazar work.

While one particular merchant prince was delivering an 'inspiring' speech on the tasks of economic reconstruction (which he pronounced as 'reckon-struckshun') an obscure journalist in a corner nudged his colleague and said, 'Not bad for *my* first speech eh!'

Five P. M.—The over-worked Bureaucrats in the above thousand bracket sipped their modest cups of tea to fortify themselves against another attack of files (Printer: It is files and not *piles*!). The more conscientious telephoned their wives to tell them they would be late for dinner owing to 'unexpected pressure of work', which might or might not have something to do with the appointment with their lady secretaries for a snack at Davicos—and a little drive afterwards!

The shadows lengthened across Parliament Street as the sun dipped lower in the west and the working day in New Delhi ground itself towards the climax—or anti-climax.

Six P. M.—The Officers in the above-thousand bracket repaired to the screened-off corner in their rooms and washed with the help of a porcelain jug and wash basin, splashing the water on their well-polished shoes. Then they brushed their already thinning hair, adjusted their ties, smiled at their own reflections in the mirror, gave instructions to their respective official peons to deliver to their homes a bundle of files and some provisions from the stores—and to tell the Mem. sahib that the Sahib was working late at the office!

A cavalcade of bicycles, bells ringing, started from the Secretariat and branched out in every direction.

Seven P. M.—A colourful array of flowers set off the velvety green lawn in Connaught Place. The soldier and his girl manifested themselves everywhere—on the grassy carpet, on benches, walking along the promenade, in restaurants and cafes and bars. The WACs and the WRENS and the fair members of other similar gallant organizations after finishing their day-time jobs, took upon themselves further duties to help the war effort by entertaining the heroes who are going to win this 'People's War'!

The Yanks put on their swanky walking-out dresses, grabbed the prettiest girls available, and sauntered out

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towards the luxurious 'Duration Den' and the not-so-luxurious India Coffee House. Those with archaeological inclinations sought to enlarge the minds of their 'gals' by taking them to see the wonderful ruins—'old places and temples and what-nots, sweetheart!'—in which the landscape round about abounds.

Eight P. M.—In the super-super-posh new headquarters of All India Radio (where the rooms and the minds are all air-conditioned) Bokhari's Boys, in their smart rig-out of narrow, tapering trousers and long, tweed sporting coats, preened themselves and polished their accents for the evening's broadcasts. 'This is All-India Radio radiating *see-multaneously* on umpteen point umpteen, umpteen meter-bands.'

Sardarni Theka Singh, Begum Khadim-e-Qadeem and Mrs Sarkarka Sewak, in their respective boudoirs, polished their nails, put the finishing touches to the hair-do, tried different saris and, remembering B. O., applied just a dab of an expensive scent behind the lobe of the ear.

Nine P.M.—At the Chelmsford Club, a big crowd had turned up—contractors and contract bridge players, minor princes and princely majors, princesses and mistresses of princes, tailors and tailors' dummies, men and women in uniform. Government officials and their wives, Beauty, Money, Power!

The 'chotas' were ordered for men, and self-conscious women fearfully tasted their first cocktails. A contractor who supplies tents to the Army buttonholed a Supply Department official and ordered a cocktail without even enquiring whether the unwilling guest drank! A young Captain told a fifth-hand joke he had read in *Frenchy Frolics* and there was a roar of laughter, and the young man was unanimously voted the life and soul of the party.

Ten P.M.—Several thousand clerks told their respective wives that they simply could not afford to buy any new summer clothes for the children this year. 'And now for heaven's sake, let me sleep. I have to get up at six to be in time at the office.'

Several hundred young men in their teens, fresh from college, the light in their eyes still undimmed, burnt the

midnight oil, practising shorthand, having already spent the evening at a 'Typewriting and Shorthand Institute'.

Several hundred young men wrote and re-wrote drafts of applications for clerical jobs, while several hundred more young men polished their shoes and mended their torn socks to make a neat appearance at tomorrow's interview before the Selection Board.

Eleven P. M.—Fifty pairs of dancers gyrated round and round the dance floor at the Chelmsford Club.

The undistinguished band, after murdering several waltzes and rhumbas, struck up a peculiar tune—improvised from a cheap Punjabi song, *Sunnaade, Sunnaade, Sunnaade Rassiya!*

A Sikh contractor is dancing with his plumpish wife, a civilian has a WAC in his arms, an English A. D. C., in a tight, Fascist-looking, black uniform, has an Indian girl as his partner. Round and round and round they go, as the band continues to blare out the Punjabi tune set to a rhumba rhythm.

There are stains and splashes of beer and whisky on the table cloths, and on one corner table two beer glasses lie broken in a little pool of the yellow liquid.

And it is *Sunnaade, Sunnaade, Sunnaade, Rassiya* over and over and over again.

Twelve Midnight.—In front of the Viceregal Palace the guard is being changed.

A stone's throw from there is the central gate of the Secretariat, now shrouded in darkness. But if there was a searchlight kept trained on it, the nocturnal visitor (if any) would have seen that some humorist with a bitter sense of irony had inscribed on it the subversive legend:

Liberty will not descend to a people, a people must raise themselves to liberty; it is a blessing that must be earned before it can be enjoyed.

New Delhi

ANAND BHAWAN RECEIVES A GUEST

—March 19

Anand Bhawan, the Abode of Joy, has been silent witness of many a historic scene.

The house that Motilal Nehru built for his family, after dedicating his earlier residence—Swaraj Bhawan—to the nation, is one of the outstanding landmarks of the dusty, straggling city of Allahabad.

It is more than a landmark. It is a place of pilgrimage, as sacred to the devotees of freedom as the Sangam, the confluence of the Ganges and the Jumna, some miles away, is to the religious-minded.

For Anand Bhawan, too, marks a Sangam, the confluence of two ways of living—of the gracious, generous, somewhat leisurely, but life giving, cultured charm that was Motilal, and the tempestuous, dynamic, fast-flowing current of impatient idealism that is Jawaharlal Nehru. The house bears the impress of both father and son.

It is a gracious house, built for abundant comfort and royal hospitality.

The lovely garden, aflame with multi-coloured flowers, the green lawn, studded with the gem of an exquisite marble fountain, the ancient shady trees and the vast grounds, provide a perfect setting for the noble, double storied pile of brick and stone that is so appropriately crowned with a white dome. There is nothing of the shoddy 'bungalow architecture' about this house. The floor is pure marble, the arches of the verandah are broad and straight-angular in the old Hindu style, but the dome has the perfect curves of Moghul architecture—a reminder of the man who built it, a pandit who was a scholar of Persain and who was the finest product of the North Indian culture that had evolved out of the fusion of all that is best in Hindu and Muslim cultures.

Inside, it is the personality of the heir that dominates. The sitting room, designed for large family gatherings and hosts of friends, is plainly furnished in a rather heavy, oldish style. There are a few photographs on the walls—one of the

great Chiangs signed in Chinese, another of the even greater Sun Yat-sens, signed in English, 'For Mr Nehru—Soong Chingling'. On the wall are Chinese scrolls and paintings beside the portraits of the two Nehrus. The dining room is more modernistically furnished, and the decorations include a long strip of khaddar in national tri-colour, artistically draped in the centre of the wall, two paintings of snow-clad Himalayan landscapes and one of a group of romping wild horses. One has only to look at them to think of the man who loves open air and snow-clad mountains, whose spirit is free and untamed—and who is today in jail!

Upstairs, in the huge library, are shelves reaching up to the ceiling, filed 'with the wisdom of the ancients, the faith of the middle ages and the scepticism of the present and glimpses of the glory that is to be.' It was here, surrounded by the world's choicest classics, that the Congress Working Committee has held in the past some of its most historic meetings. It was the favourite room of Mahatma Gandhi, who passed most of his time squatting on this carpeted floor, whenever he visited Allahabad. There are almost as many books in Jawaharlal's own bed-room as in the library. But while the library abounds in the classics reference books and general literature, the latest publications on politics, sociology, socialism, poetry, travel and adventure are to be found in the low shelves that line the walls of the bed-room.

This is undoubtedly the room of a man of good taste and wide literary interests, and a man in love with the members of his family, for framed photographs of his father and mother, wife, sisters and daughter are everywhere.

To this house in the past have come men and women of eminence and goodwill from all parts of India, from every corner of the earth—political leaders, Congress workers, writers and poets and journalists, Gandhi and Tagore and Ansari and Sapru and Malaviya, Annie Besant and Sarojini Naidu, Cripps and Eve Curie and Gunther and Fischer. This house has resounded with political argument, with women's voices and children's merry laughter, its walls hold the echoes of Motilal's famous hearty chuckle and Jawaharlal's refined yet passionate accents.

But for many years now the house has known long spells of loneliness. The great Motilal is no more, daughter-in-law

Kamala has departed from this world. The daughters of the house are married (one, alas, has recently been widowed in her prime) and the heir to Motilal's estate is oftener to be found in a prison cell than in this pleasant home. Since August, 1942, there have been many months when the entire house was shut up and, like a forsaken widow, lay sunk in gloomy silence. It is only recently that life has returned to it since the fragile Indira and her pleasant mannered young husband, Feroze, were released from imprisonment. But Anand Bhawan was built not for a solitary couple, but for a huge family, with children and guests. And, upstairs in their room, Indira and Feroze have felt lonely and miserable in this house that is filled with memories and peopled by ghosts.

Last week, Anand Bhawan was roused from its gloomy solitude. The great big house yawned, shook off its months of lethargy, washed and preened itself and put on its best appearance to receive a guest. All the rooms were opened and aired and dusted, flowers appeared in vases, fresh linen was laid out and there was gleam of China and silverware in the dining room.

High up on the roof where the gallant national tricolour ever flutters in the wind appeared another flag—the blue-and-red-and-white flag of the Chinese Republic. For the guest was coming from China. Anand Bhawan was preparing to receive Dr Lin Yutang.

Lin Yutang (literally Lin means 'Forest' and Yutang means 'Hall of Language') scholar and linguist, mellow humorist and passionate advocate of freedom, was, when he arrived in India, only carrying forward the tradition of those ancient compatriots of his, Fa Hian and Hsuan-Tsang, the wise Chinese travellers who came to India in centuries gone by.

Combining in himself the essence of the wisdom of Confucius and Lao Tse, the philosophy of pre-Nazi German savants like Heinrich Heine, the brilliant literary style of a Chesterton or a Leacock, and Sun Yat-sen's zeal for freedom and democracy, Lin Yutang is known the world over as the best interpreter of the mind and the spirit of his people. But he is more than a Chinese scholar and patriot. He belongs to that small group of 'citizens of the world' who have roots in their native soil but open their leaves and branches to the

sun and the four winds. The frontiers of Lin Yutang's sympathy are known to transcend geographical and racial boundaries. To India he came without a trace of the foreign tourist's superior airs or petty inquisitiveness. And when he arrived at Anand Bhawan it was like home-coming for him.

Though living mostly in America and engaged in literary, patriotic and international activities, Lin Yutang has been inspired with a vision—the vision of an Asia awakened and united in its defence against the encroachments of the aggressive Imperialisms of the West. Repeatedly he had written and spoken of the historic role that India and China—and, possibly, the half-Asiatic Soviet Union—must play together in this great process of the emergence of Asia as a dynamic factor in the reshaping of the world.

In the pursuit of this vision of an awakened Asia (which is not fundamentally opposed to the world vision, and has nothing in common with the Japanese Jingo's slogan of 'Asia For Asiatics') Lin Yutang found a kindred soul in Jawaharlal Nehru, who, through his writings and speeches and by his personal visit to China, has demonstrated his unshakable faith in the same ideals. Separated by thousands of miles, the Chinese scholar and the Indian leader have yet learnt to admire each other and to seek inspiration from each other's faith in the common purpose.

But last week when Lin Yutang arrived in Allahabad for a brief stay at Nehru's house, Anand Bhawan, Nehru was not there to receive him, being far away a prisoner of the British Government in Ahmednagar Fort!

The two flags flying side by side on the top of Anand Bhawan were eloquent testimony to the importance of the occasion. If the house was a monument to the struggle for Indian freedom, the guest who had come to stay there was the very symbol of the ancient wisdom and the modern revolutionary temper of China.

With the celebrity came the inevitable reporter! Having travelled over three thousand miles, all the way from Bombay to Delhi, from Delhi to Calcutta, and from Calcutta to Allahabad, I had earned my exclusive interview—though meeting the great and wise 'Hall of Language' was worth all this trouble, even without the interview.

Lucky to be able to travel with him from Howrah to Allahabad, and, thanks to the hospitality of the Feroze Gandhis, privileged to stay at Anand Bhawan, in the room adjacent to his, I was to have pretty long talks on an astonishing range of topics with Dr Lin, which would need almost a book to recapitulate.

The one enduring impression left on my mind, was of a simple and kindly man, in love with life in all its manifestations, one of those rare writers who have achieved perfect harmony between their writings and their way of living. There is nothing of the 'Great Author' about Lin Yutang—much less of the 'Great Man'. He is unsophisticated and unassuming; he is modest, but his modesty is not of the false, hypocritical variety. All the way from Calcutta to Allahabad, Dr Lin was again and again telling me what a great privilege it was for him to have this opportunity of staying at Anand Bhawan, the house of 'the great Nehru'. And that night he told me he could hardly sleep, thinking all the time of the historic things that had happened under the same roof.

I have met many foreigners interested in India and some of them quite sympathetic to the cause of Indian freedom. But talking to Lin Yutang one feels here is someone who does not sympathize with our aspirations in the conventional sense, but who has the same aspirations, *who is one of us*. One does not have to 'propagandize' him with facts and figures to prove our anti-Imperialist case, for he is instinctively and emotionally *with us, of us*.

Characteristic was his brief comment as, early in the morning, the train thundered past a village awakening to a new day—peasants on the way to their fields, women busy at their chores, the crowd at the well. He simply said 'Just like China—and just as poor!'

Here was a man who, unlike the average tourist and journalist, was concerned only with the fundamentals of life and expressed his reactions in statements of fundamental truth.

RELEASED !

—May 7

Gandhiji has been released at last !

But once again a cloud of anxiety hangs over the life of India's most beloved leader. The Doctors' Bulletins from Poona have again put the war communiques in the background.

A nation prays and hopes and fears—and hopes again !

GANDHIJI IN JUHU

—May 21

JUHU !

Gandhiji could have chosen no odder place than this for his recuperation.

The sandy stretch of palm-fringed beach has been the favourite haunt of Bombay's holiday-makers. Until recently Juhu was synonymous with picnic parties, moonlight romances, masses of pink flesh being baked and browned in the sun, empty beer bottles rolling on the sands.

Nearby is the aerodrome, and the long wall of palms stretching along the coast has been cut for about a hundred yards to allow planes to take off. The roar of flying machines provides a new refrain to the symphony of surf beating on the shore.

To the colour scheme of blue sky, blue sea and silvery sands has been added recently the khaki motif, and batches of 'Tommies' and 'Doughboys' may be seen strolling along the beach.

Juhu is a mixture of contrasts. There is the Theosophical Colony for the lofty souls who want to lose themselves in the contemplation of the Infinite. There are also the cottages, huts and shacks of the millionaires, to which they

flee when they want to escape the rigours of Share Bazar operations. There are restaurants where you may sip a cold drink under a striped umbrella and imagine yourself on the Riviera, and also there are the *Naryalpani wallahs* from whom you can buy a coconut and quench your thirst at nature's own soda fountain.

The Mahatma has added himself to these Juhu contrasts and brought a few more contrasts in his wake! The crowd that daily makes the pilgrimage to Juhu is as varied as the population of this country.

To Gandhi-Gram at Juhu, during the last ten days, have come millionaire and beggar, plutocrat and proletarian, poet and politician, merchant and musician, newspaper man and newspaper woman. Indian, Englishman, American and Chinese have mingled in the crowd that gathers every evening to join the Mahatma at his prayers. They have rolled up in their limousines, come in crowded suburban trains, trudged along the dusty road. They have lain in ambush like guerillas, they have led surprise 'attacks', made encircling movements, followed almost every strategy of war—just to get as near the beloved old man as possible. They have been told off, turned out, rebuked, implored to keep away. Still they have come! For, *they are the people*. And they feel they have a proprietary right over the man who is the symbol of their national honour and national aspirations.

Proudest of all who have been able to see Gandhiji, however, is Chang Sun, a young Chinese Journalist now in the city. A member of the staff of *Ta Kung-pao* (which literally means 'Impartial Newspaper') the leading Chinese daily published simultaneously in Chungking and Kweilin, Chang Sun is on his way to the United States to start a New York edition of his paper. Last week he just missed a boat leaving for America and insists that he was lucky to have missed it because it gave him an opportunity to see Gandhiji. He spent nearly four hours in Gandhi-Gram one evening, talking to Mrs Naidu and Mrs Pandit, and was privileged to be near Gandhiji during the prayer. When he returned, he was grinning from ear to ear, excitedly happy because of all the journalists—Indian or foreign—he had been nearest to the Mahatma.

Of Mrs Naidu, Chang Sun said, ‘ She has great knowledge. She knows so much about China. But she is like a man. One can talk to her so easily.’

He was interested in meeting Mrs Pandit ‘ because she is Mr Nehru’s sister and a personal friend of Madame Chiang ’. Asked for his impressions of Gandhiji, whom he had seen but had not spoken to, young Chang Sun smiled ecstatically and, finding his English too inadequate, just said, ‘ Mister Gandhi—he looks so kind. He is a great man, a very great man.’

‘ NOT DONE ! ’

—May 28

Would Gandhiji eventually see Wavell? Frankly I do not know. But according to Eve Curie, Wavell would like to see Gandhiji.

The journalist daughter of the famous woman scientist was in India during the Cripps negotiations and has many an interesting story to tell in her book *Journey Among Warriors*. During her stay in New Delhi she was a guest of the Commander-in-Chief. This is how she records a historic evening.

I was much too excited to keep my secret to myself and, bursting with pride, I said to the Commander-in-Chief :

‘ I am going to see Gandhi tomorrow morning at seven.’

Wavell’s single eye expressed an intense interest, pleasure, and a nuance of envy while he muttered in an undertone :

‘ I should like to see Gandhi ’

He had said it as a joke, but undoubtedly he meant it. And in fact, the most useful exchange of views that could have taken place at this point of the British-Indian negotiations was probably one between the Commander-in-Chief of India’s armed forces and the Pacifist leader of India’s non-violent crowds. Such were, however, the relations between the English and ‘ Political Indians ’ that, apart from officially arranged meetings, a British General could not take his car, drive to Birla House and drop in informally for a cup of tea and a private chat with Mr Gandhi. It was simply ‘ not done ’.

It simply is 'not done'! That might well be the epitaph of British Imperialism. How many opportunities of liquidating distrust and bitterness, of creating goodwill, have been lost because of a petty fastidiousness for prestige and formality!

Can Lord Wavell pick up that telephone in his office, as Eve Curie had done from his home, and tell the operator: 'Long Distance...Bombay, Juhu. Mr Morarji's shack. No, I don't know the number. Find it out for me, will you?' And then when the call is established, 'Hello, Mr Gandhi, this is Wavell speaking. I am so glad to hear you are better... Do you remember you once wrote to my predecessor that you wanted to meet him? Well, I am sorry it was not possible for him at that time. But do you think it would be possible for us to meet...Well, then let's say next week.'

Will Lord Wavell do it? Of course, not! It simply is *not done*! A Viceroy does not pick up the telephone and ring up the number he wants. He presses a button and a liveried servant in gold-and-red enters. He asks for the Military Secretary. The Military Secretary enters. The Viceroy should ask *him* to get the desired number. But by that time, perhaps, the Viceroy will remember that he is not expected to ring up a private individual—even if he happens to be the most important individual in the land. It simply is *not done*!

* * * *

I was lucky the other day to escape the constant and unrelenting vigil of Mrs Sarojini Naidu and sneak into the grounds of Gandhi-Gram. It is not difficult to be lost in that beautiful garden and by the time the prayer started, I had worked my way up to a place five feet from the dais where Gandhiji sat. During the prayers in different languages and representing different faiths (how many people out of the 10,000 present, I wonder, knew that a verse was recited from the Holy Qoran?) as I steadily looked at that famous profile quite irrelevant thoughts struck me.

I thought that Gandhiji's skin is soft and smooth like silk—or, rather, satin!

I thought it remarkable that he sat through the twenty-minute prayer immobile and silent like a statue, his head moving slightly only once.

I saw, while he was signing autographs after the prayer, that his hand shook a little from weakness.

And I marvelled at this old man who, even at 74 and after such a serious illness, is still brimful of a lively sense of humour. He doesn't speak, but one can see the smile of mischief in his eyes. When some Chinese visitors asked him to scribble a message on a beautiful pictorial album, he wrote down smilingly 'How can I disfigure this beautiful thing with my horrid writing?' And when he charged them his usual fee for giving them his autograph, he wrote down, 'Am I not greedy? Are all so greedy?' And I thought we are lucky to have a leader who has a sense of humour and are not condemned like the Germans to suffer the ever-grim countenance of Hitler

A little boy proudly told me of his unusual privilege. He was taken in to Gandhiji one morning and actually had his nose tweaked by the great man. The little fellow was holding aloft his nose as if it had become something special—almost sacrosanct! But he wanted the world to know that his intimacy with the Mahatma had not been confined to the nose, but that actually they had also compared the length of their respective ears and found the Mahatma's were 'only a little bigger'.

And, finally, when I saw the white-clad figure on the dais and facing him the thousands of men and women on the beach, all eyes focussed on him, I thought Here are both the foreground and background of the picture of India, the symbol and the multitude, Gandhiji and his people!

‘THIS IS IT!’

—June 11

‘Ladies and gentlemen, this is it!’

Only six words uttered by a spokesman of the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Force ‘somewhere in England’ to a gathering of sleepy-eyed war correspondents roused out of their beds by an urgent summons. Yet these are the words the world had waited to hear for over two years.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is it! IT! The Second Front! The beginning of the end of Hitler and Nazism! This is it!! *This is it!!!*

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From the Second Front to the Juhu waterfront, from the roar of bombers and the crash of bombs to the slow monotone of *Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram*—it is, indeed, a far cry! Or is it?

The other day as I sat among the crowd at Gandhiji’s evening prayer and saw a few British and American soldiers on the fringes of the throng, I wondered what they, the tough fighting men, thought about it all. But I could not ask them, as by the time the prayer was over they were gone.

I got some inkling of it when I met a ‘Doughboy’ speaking a broad, almost unintelligible nasal twang at the Friends of the Soviet Union Congress. He was unhappy about something, but he irrelevantly declared, ‘You guys have too much religion.’ I told him that, the church-like appearance of the Convocation Hall notwithstanding, what we had held there was a meeting to send fraternal greetings to a notoriously godless people and not a religious service. The ‘Doughboy’ got lost in the crowd and I did not meet him again. But if he reads these lines and comes round to our office, I would like to go into the matter with him.

‘You guys have too much religion.’ There is a great deal of truth in this statement which was also expressed by Doctor Lin Yutang—though in slightly different words! Not only foreigners but many young, rational-minded Indians believe that we in India can do with a little less of religion.

This writer himself is no believer in prayer—except as a process of self-hypnosis by which a man who believes in it might strengthen his will-power—and, but for the attraction of a fascinating personality like Gandhiji, wild horses could not drag him to a prayer-meeting.

Yet I have been thinking that it is not merely Gandhiji, the leader of ‘spiritual’ India, but also the leaders of ‘materialist’ Britain and America who parade their religions in public and invoke the help of prayer, even in their far-from-spiritual activities.

The mid-Atlantic meeting between Churchill and Roosevelt to devise a strategy of war was given a spiritual colour by the much publicized Sunday service held on board a destroyer!

The fall of Rome to the Allied armies brought this remark from President Roosevelt :

‘The churches and shrines of Rome are symbols of the faith and determination of the early saints and martyrs that Christianity should live and become universal.’

Yet if Gandhiji were to issue a statement saying: ‘The temples and shrines of Benares are symbols of the faith and determination of the early saints and martyrs that Hinduism should live and become universal,’ wouldn’t there be a howl all over the world ?

Two days later, President Roosevelt offered a prayer for the success of the Second Front. Of course, he didn’t have to don a loin-cloth or to sit cross-legged. In his usual lounge suit, he bent forward toward the microphone on his desk and said, ‘My fellow Americans, in this poignant hour I ask you to join with me in a prayer.’

The prayer asked God’s blessings on the men who ‘this day have set out upon a mighty endeavour, the struggle to preserve our Republic, religion and civilization and set free a suffering humanity.’

This prayer business induces strange thoughts in me.

First, can God really be bothered to receive, judge and act upon each of the millions of prayers sent to Him ? Secondly, what about mutually contradictory prayers—Hitler’s prayers for victory and Roosevelt’s prayers for victory; the farmer’s prayers for rain and the potter’s prayers for no rain ? And if each prayer is granted or rejected

on its merits, why pray at all? By the way, how does Stalin manage to gain more victories without any prayers. And why do Bible-reading, prayer-offering generals sometimes suffer defeats? Lastly, it might be necessary for humanity to launch upon wars of self-extinction, but why drag God and Christ into it?

Yes, we guys *have* too much religion, and I don't believe in prayers. But if they have to be offered, I prefer the Juhu prayers to the White House prayers. At least, Gandhiji prays to a universal God in a mood of humility and righteousness—and he prays for peace and the triumph of truth and not to the God of modern Christians for victory and the triumph of arms!

ZERO HOUR THAT WAS NOT

—September 3

There is a classic story told of a London newspaper editor who wanted to scoop all his rivals in giving the result of the annual Oxford-Cambridge Boat Race which is so eagerly awaited by millions of partisans of the Cantab and the Oxonian.

This far-sighted and resourceful editor had a brain-wave which would enable him to bring out a special supplement announcing the result of the Race, within a few seconds of the finish, thus beating all other papers by at least an hour. He got two supplements ready in advance—one printed in light-blue ink announcing a Cambridge victory, the other printed in dark-blue ink announcing an Oxford triumph. Hours before the race began both supplements were kept ready, one of them to be rushed out the moment a flash came to say which team had won. Newsboys stood by, like horses at the starting gate, prepared to snatch the bundles and rush out. And the editor rubbed his hands in glee in anticipation of his triumph over his rivals.

But the joyful anticipation turned to dismay. That year the result was, for once, a dead-heat. Both supplements had to be scrapped.

By the time a third edition was prepared and printed, all the other papers were already selling their supplements on the streets.

Something like that happened to Indian journalists when, at the eleventh hour, the Gandhi-Jinnah meeting, set for August 20 or 21, was postponed owing to the sudden indisposition of the *Qaid-e-Azam*.

August 20 was a Saturday and the next day naturally was a Sunday. And so all the Saturday and Sunday papers for that week were prepared in anticipation of the fact that their appearance would synchronize with the beginning of the momentous talks. On Thursday afternoon when some of the Saturday papers were already in press came the bomb-shell: The talks were postponed at least for some weeks.

It was a terrible let-down. Last-minute changes were made to avoid a major *faux pas*, in some cases, after the first few copies had been printed. 'Today' was changed to 'soon'—the present tense hurriedly converted into 'immediate future'! And yet it was too late to change the entire make-up of papers that had been specially designed to 'cover' the talks. Thus the *People's War*, the Communist Party weekly, came out on Saturday with a special issue dedicated to the success of the talks, with a long special article by C. P. I. Secretary P. C. Joshi, entitled 'THEY SHALL NOT FAIL', beginning with the words, 'The Gandhi-Jinnah meeting is a great event in the national history of India..... The great leaders.....are meeting to see if they can come together, if a United Front can be established to put an end to British insolence.'

Blitz started off with a significant front-page headline: 'ZERO HOUR' FOR INDIA! and featured a double-column block of Gandhiji and Mr Jinnah with the caption: 'BLITZ wishes them good luck', instead of an editorial.

The Hindustan Times weekly edition came out that Sunday with a brilliant but unfortunately 'premature' MERE GOSSIP Column by 'Super' on 'What REALLY happened at Mount Pleasant Road', along with an interesting signed article by Confrere E. Narayanan (*alter ego* of 'Super') on

Mr Jinnah and his house: 'NO DUST ON MOUNT PLEASANT'.

The local *Mirror*, self-consciously and painstakingly anti-Pakistan, warned, 'NO MUNICH ON MOUNT PLEASANT' though it was obviously careful to make the necessary last-minute changes in its tenses

We ourselves were slightly luckier and had time to scrap or hold over the several articles, features, photographs and cartoons that we had specially prepared for the occasion. THE LAST PAGE almost became a casualty when the paragraphs originally written for the occasion were substituted by others scribbled at a moment's notice.

But beggars can't be choosers, and journalists can't complain if leaders happen to fall ill at an inconvenient moment, upsetting the advance arrangements of week-end publications.

The journalists Were out-scooped, Rajaji was left standing on wardha Railway station the Khaksars found themselves without employment, and forced to spend their time in selling literature and polishing shoes. The Police Commissioner was left with a declaration on his hands which made him look a little silly. The Special Correspondents who had rushed all the way from New Delhi to Bombay had to go back without their 'story'. But there was one other man whose plans were upset by Mr Jinnah's sudden illness. Indeed, it was a case of sheer poetic justice—the saboteur finding that his carefully timed bomb had actually gone off too prematurely !

The talks were expected to begin on Saturday. On Friday morning, New Delhi published the Gandhi-Viceroy correspondence. It was (like the two Boat Race supplements of the London editor) a brilliant brain-wave—yet it misfired owing to an incalculable factor. In London, it was the unexpected dead-heat, both boats crossing the winning line together—neck-to-neck, as they say in horse racing parlance—which upset the shrewd editor's calculations. In India, a little 'flu germ did the trick. And Wavell's time-bomb exploded in thin air. The confusion of the Viceroy, however, will be complete only when the two political boats of Gandhi and Jinnah race to a dead-heat, and both alternate supplements announcing 'JINNAH WINS' and 'GANDHI WINS' have to be substituted by a third—'INDIA WINS' !

THE PALM AND THE PEEPUL

—September 10

This is the story of the Palm and the Peepul, growing out of the same soil.

The Palm was tall and slim and erect, proud, aloof and unbending.

The Peepul had a humbler stature but afforded a more hospitable shade. Rooted in the earth, it was a friend of the earthy and the lowly.

The Peepul was of a sentimental type, throwing its branches and leaves in all directions to embrace whoever passed by. Many a time it extended a leafy hand in the direction of his neighbour Palm. But the Palm was haughty and aloof and suspicious, and took the Peepul's gesture of friendship to be a subtle form of attack.

And thus they remained—the Palm and the Peepul—their branches and trunks separated by nothing more tangible than the air, though under the soil their roots were inextricably intertwined.

But a woodcutter arrived in the neighbourhood and began felling trees. To him neither the Palm nor the Peepul had any sanctity. He started by placing an iron fencing round both trees to keep out other woodcutters, and within the bigger enclosure he set up yet another fencing round each of the two trees—to keep them apart! But he knew so little of the fundamentals of Botany that he forgot about the roots that could not be separated.

And the woodcutter sharpened his axe, trying its edge now on the branches of the Peepul, now on the bark of the Palm, prepared to cut down the Peepul altogether, and the Palm, in its haughty majesty, looked down upon his neighbour-in-anguish and thought he was safe. But the woodcutter soon disillusioned him with a tentative slash at the slim trunk which set the whole length of the Palm swaying violently. The Palm knew that if today it was the turn of the Peepul, tomorrow it would be his.

And so the lofty, haughty Palm condescended to bend a little towards the Peepul, which was already sending up leafy

shoots in friendly greeting. Thus the neighbours once again established friendly contact after many years. And the woodcutter was dismayed.

Botanists know—and the woodcutter knows—that since the roots are intertwined, if either the Peepul or the Palm is cut down or transplanted in other soil, the other too must inevitably be uprooted.

But does the Palm know?

We hope he does! We hope he does!

SUSPENSE

—September 17

It is as if all activity, all thought, the whole stream of life, were in a state of suspended animation. One does not know if we are living in the most fruitful, the most glorious days of our country's history, or in the most tragic and the most heart-breakingly barren. It all depends on which way the Gandhi-Jinnah talks, still going on as these lines are written, end.*

The fool speculates. The pious pray. The sensible agnostic can only hope. And, today, even hope seems too inadequate a palliative to relieve the nerve-racking suspense.

Sprawled across the velvety lawn in Mr Jinnah's compound, like all other reporters, in an assumed pose of careless languor, while one's eyes are still fixed on those half-open first floor windows for the least discernible gesture or movement, and one's mind vainly tries to imagine the talks that are going on, I keep wondering if the two leaders, under the stress and weight of their own tremendous responsibility, ever seek a diversion by imagining the state of nerves the three-dozen-odd journalists have been in, during the whole of last week.

* They ended the following week, alas, in failure

But a journalist never says die, and whatever his personal feeling or suspense, he must keep his chin up. A sense of humour is the only balm for frayed nerves.

One day, arriving late for the evening talks, I found the whole gathering of newsmen hushed and anxious-looking. Some sat gazing up at the windows, others paced up and down the gravel drive. No one talked above a whisper. I remarked that every one looked like the proverbial prospective father waiting in the lobby of a maternity home. The ice was broken, the tense expressions relaxed and grim faces broke in smiles. My remark was greeted by further elaborations on the same theme, most of which were, of course, unprintable!

Amidst the shower of mild profanity, spoke one reporter, wiser in his words than his looks, 'But, of course, something *is* being born up there—UNITED INDIA!' To which a cynic added: 'Or will it be an abortion?'

Journalists are also human beings—though many people (including journalists) seem to forget this fact!

And Indian journalists do sometimes suffer from the common human ailment known as patriotism. Difficult as it might be to believe, often they do personally feel the urgency poignancy of a national crisis. The robot reporter has yet to be invented!

Never before have I found so much evidence of the average reporter's intense feeling for the unity and freedom of his country as during the Gandhi-Jinnah talks. (And I make this statement knowing that it will be laughed at as 'sissy stuff' by the journalists themselves, even by those who have reacted to the alternating periods of optimism and pessimism as if it were a matter of life and death for some near and dear one. The mask of cynicism, after all, is the journalist's only armour!)

Take, for instance, the journalist who has spent years in debunking, denouncing, criticizing, condemning Pakistan. He has written an exhaustive book against Pakistan. If the talks fail, the book will sell like hot cakes. If the talks result in a settlement, it will be consigned to the wastepaper-basket. Yet he comes to me and says, 'Damn the book. I want the talks to succeed!' It is difficult enough to throw

overboard the convictions of a life-time. But only a journalist knows how much harder it is for a journalist to give up a chance of earning a couple of thousand rupees.

Or, take the special correspondent from Lahore, who told a Bombay colleague, in tones of earnest pleading, 'YOU must see to it that the talks succeed !' As if the local man had it in his power !

The journalists are in the midst of the whirlpool. But the common citizen is no less stirred.

Every night I reach home about midnight. On the way I have to make a halt at least at four places, for friends are waiting for the latest news. Too weary to climb three flights of stairs, I shout the evening bulletin at one friend. Immediately I am surrounded by a dozen people who have been taking a midnight stroll on the quiet road. They all want the latest news from Mount Pleasant !

One need not believe in spiritualism to be interested in the harmless exercises in self-delusion of those who do.

How many amateur astrologers, horoscope-readers and planchette-experts have been busy during the last few days, seeking the aid of the Supernatural to find in advance the result of the talks ? I do not presume to know.

But there is a whole bunch of people in Dadar who gather round a table every night to 'interview' (through a planchette) some well-informed spirit about the trend of the talks. The shade of Mahadeva Desai, it seems, was invoked one night and caused the planchette pencil to scribble the message that the talks had begun with a recapitulation of Hindu-Muslim relations since 1916 (the year of the Lucknow Pact), that they would continue till the 18th, that there definitely would be a happy settlement, but that its terms would be made known to the public only in early October.

My fanatical Rationalist friend says: 'This proves nothing. It was the subconscious of the medium causing the planchette to write what he desired it to write.'

To which I reply: 'If this is so, then it proves a lot. For it proves how keen the common people subconsciously are for a settlement—including even Hindu Mahasabhaites.'

For, surprisingly enough, this particular planchette-medium is a follower of Mr Savarkar.

I know people who cannot sleep these days; I know people who cannot concentrate on their work, people who have quarrelled with their best friends over the issue of a Congress-League settlement. Old, orthodox Hindus have said to me: 'Let the League get anything it wants, but let India be free,' and others have confidently asserted: 'No, no, Jinnah Saheb will never let us down!' Staunch, rabid Muslim Leaguers have expressed to me their admiration for Gandhiji's sincerity and earnestness about the settlement and declared their full faith in the two leaders' determination not to part without agreement.

And, in this hour of continued country-wide suspense, I record it all here to sustain the readers' hopes—and my own!

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Among the brave and optimistic words spoken during the last seven days, here is the memorable remark of....., but I need not reveal the name as there is only one wit in India capable of such an epigram:

'Hitherto, there were three Gs in India—God, Government and Gandhi. From now on there will be two Gs and one J—God, Gandhi and Jinnah!'

One G seems to be in for an eclipse!

No wonder the Government of India's NEWS PARADE is not showing the Gandhi-Jinnah meeting on the screen!

WHEN SUPERSTITION IS NOT SUPERSTITION!

—November 19

'Have you seen *THE SONG OF BERNADETTE*, my dear?'

'Oh, yes, isn't it simply divine? So...so...divine?'

'Have you seen *SANT SAKHU*, lady?'

'Oh, no, I rarely go to these INDIAN films. And this one is about some woman saint. You know how I detest this religious hocus-pocus!'

When is superstition not superstition?

Naturally, when it wears the halo of a European-Christian saint and not the 'native' garb of a Hindu saint or a Muslim *pir*!

And so *The Song of Bernadette* is hailed as a masterpiece, gushingly admired by the ladies and gentlemen of Bombay 'society'—the very people who would flatly refuse to see *Sant Tukaram*, *Sant Tulcidas*, *Sant Kabir*, or even the film on the life of a woman saint, *Sant Sakhu*. On the ground that they do not approve of such superstitious stuff!

I have seen the picture and found it a calculated glorification of irrational SUPERSTITION, all the more dangerous because it is so beautifully photographed and (so far as the main role is concerned) so sensitively acted. No one is going to sell ME a picture of Hitler by drawing attention to the beautiful frame, and no one is going to sell me superstition by framing it in brilliant filmic technique!

And *The Song of Bernadette* is nothing if not an attempt to perpetuate a superstitious legend about a girl who (apparently quite sincerely—under a delusion!) thought she had seen Virgin Mary in a vision and consequently discovered a spring with healing powers. With design, all the superstitious folk who believe in her are painted as good people, while those who doubt her are depicted as knaves and fools and sadists.

I can well understand devout, believing Christians, specially Catholics, raving about this picture. But what about those so-called rationally-minded, superstition-hating

gentry who are never tired of pointing the finger of scorn at the mythological and religious pictures produced in India? Once again, they have betrayed their Anglicized snobbery and innate 'inferiority complex' by swallowing UNREASON—because it comes from the allegedly rational West!

* * *

To consult a Pandit or a Maulvi about an auspicious moment to start a new venture is superstition—but to consult R. H. Naylor and his stars is not superstition!

To break a coconut for luck is superstition—but to break a champagne bottle while launching a ship is not superstition!

To celebrate Diwali or 'Id is superstition—but to celebrate Christmas is a mark of civilization!

To go to a temple or a mosque is superstition—but to go to Church is a part of social etiquette!

To talk of 'Hindu civilization' or 'Muslim culture' is just silly—but to talk of saving the world for 'Christian civilization' (as Roosevelt and Churchill do) is statesmanship!

To quote the *Gita* or the *Qoran* is old-fashioned—but to quote the Bible is a sign of literary merit!

Is it surprising, then, that Indian films like *Tukaram* and *Sakhu* are sneered at as superstitious stuff while Hollywood films like *Bernadette* are praised and admired?

CHRISTMAS EVE, 1944

—December 24

This day 1944 years ago, in a humble mud hut in Bethlehem a child was born who was destined to cause one of the greatest revolutions in world history.

This child grew into a humble working man—a carpenter. He was humble and poor but upright, unafraid of tyrants and conquerors and rulers. He was a friend of the down-trodden and the oppressed, opponent of the rich and the powerful. He drove the money-changers, those early capitalists of Palestine, out of the temple and declared that it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to pass through the gates of the Kingdom of God. When he spoke, thrones shook and tyrants quailed. He died, like many revolutionaries, on a cross!

Today, 1944 years later, the birth of that proletarian revolutionary is once again being celebrated.

But how?

Tonight, rich men and money-changers will take their bejewelled women to temples of Bacchus where wine will flow and bodies sway to the rhythm of sensuous barbaric music. Tonight, church bells will chime and soon be drowned in the tempestuous flood of dance music. Tonight, exploiters and profiteers and gamblers and profligates of many races and diverse faiths will dine and drink and flirt. Tonight there will be kissing under the mistletoe and drunken ribald songs bursting through fumes of whisky and cigarette smoke.

Tonight, on a dozen widely-separated battlefronts, bombs will burst and bullets will fly—and men will be killed by the inhumanity and greed and power-lust that still drive tyrants on the path of world-conquest!

Tonight, many hungry and homeless men and women will tramp through the night wondering when the Meek shall inherit the earth!

Tonight, through the barred windows of many a prison, idealists and visionaries will look up at the stars and wonder what day it is, what date, what year! They might wonder: what century?

1945

**.....When Hitler met his Doom but
Hitlerism' survived in many parts of
the World including France, the U.S.A.
and the British Empire.**

ROAD TO FREEDOM

—January 21

YET ANOTHER INDEPENDENCE DAY HAS COME ROUND—AND NO INDEPENDENCE!

It will be celebrated this week without a celebration. The leaders are in jail—all except Gandhiji—and cannot speak to us as of old. Silence has to serve for eloquence!

That perhaps is the fittest manner in which Independence Day should be observed—in the present circumstances! It is symbolic of the shackles of imperialism that still bind us.

Inevitably our thoughts must turn to the past, recalling the long and grim and inspiring story of our struggle for independence. The road we have travelled has been long and arduous and some of our comrades have lagged behind; the pace has varied, now slow with despair, now determined with hope, but the direction has never been in doubt. Even while we have halted our faces have been turned towards the sun.

People and events, patriots and their patriotic endeavours, places sanctified by the blood of martyrs, names hallowed by history—memories come rushing on Independence Day!

The great revolt of 1857, a blind, confused, brutal groping towards freedom, and its terrible aftermath. And, rising above it, the heroic figure of the Rani of Jhansi.

A crowd of peculiarly-dressed, bearded and *pugreed* elders—Hindus and Muslims and Parsis and Christians—are glimpsed through the haze of history holding the first session of an organization called the Indian National Congress. It is 1885. They speak in borrowed English and their accents are the accents of humility; they are 'the Queen's most humble petitioners', but in their courteous phrases one finds the germs of later revolt. They are beginning to talk of self-government!

A man walks across the horizon of India and when he speaks, he thunders; his people listen to him and their hearts are filled with a new and deliciously thrilling idea. For Tilak is saying, 'Swaraj is my birthright'. And when the foreign

rulers hear it they are afraid and put him in prison in far-off Mandalay.

Thunder in the air—no, it is rifle fire, and hundreds lie cold on the dusty ground of Jallianwalla Bagh, among the first martyrs in the cause of freedom.

There is fear in people's hearts, repression everywhere and men are afraid to speak aloud. But a frail little man appears and he gives them a weapon to fight with. It is Truth. And he gives them a new code of war. It is non-violence. He fills their hearts with courage and, following him, they are unafraid of lathis or bullets. He is a simple man, a man of the people; he speaks the people's language, he dresses and lives, like the lowliest of the low. Gandhi's voice reaches down to the masses and though there is no anger in it, no bitterness or hatred, yet it is like a battle-cry and rouses the slumbering millions.

The women, too, march in this pageant of history in the saffron-coloured saris of Desh Sevikas led by the 'Nightingale of India'—Sarojini Naidu.

From amongst the sons and heirs of the dynamic tradition of Islam, patriots spring up to answer the call of freedom. Mazharul Haq, the Ali Brothers, Doctor Ansari, Hakim Ajmal Khan, Abul Kalam Azad, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. Good Muslims and, therefore, good patriotic Indians, they are in the forefront of the country's fighting battalions.

The battle-cry echoes through the hills and valleys, sweeps across the vast plains of India. The peasants hear it in the mud-hut villages and to them the hope of freedom brings a new meaning in life—freedom from the foreign yoke and from the stranglehold of centuries-old feudal oppression!

And amidst the thunder of machines, the new proletariat hears the cry and adds its own revolutionary will to the nation's will for freedom.

The students in schools and colleges hear the battle-cry and come out into the larger university of the freedom movement.

And thus the freedom struggle gains in intensity and power from Kisan Sabhas and Trade Unions and Youth organizations. The old, week-kneed, arm-chair brigade is left behind as the new forces released in the country sweep the movement at a revolutionary tempo.

The new dynamics of the movement bring out a new leader for the people—Nehru—combining the patriots' passion for political freedom with the Socialists' passion for economic emancipation of the common people, with the internationalists' vision of linking up the Indian freedom movement as an integral part of the world-wide struggle of all progressive forces against tyranny and injustice and oppression.

Tilak, Gandhi, Mohamad Ali, Ansari, Nehru, Hindus and Muslims, Peasants and Workers and Students.

Jallianwalla Bagh massacre. Firing at Peshawar. The Dandi March, Bardoli Peasants' Satyagraha. Bombay's General Strike. Lathi charges at Azad Maidan. Babu Genu, the volunteer who died under a truck of foreign cloth. Bhagat Singh. Jatin Das who fasted to death. The Garhwalis who faced court-martial for refusing to shoot Indian Satyagrahis. Indian doctors who faced death in far-off battlefields that Republican Spain and China might live. And our leaders who are still in prisons so that we might be free!

Independence Day is all these memories and all these men and women, and all these events and deeds. It is a mile-stone that points to the long road travelled and the short road that lies ahead.

Let us not turn back, comrades!

WHERE IS HITLER ?

—February 4

Where is Hitler? Yes, indeed, where is the Fuehrer today—geographically, historically, ideologically and psychologically?

Judging from the speech he broadcast on the twelfth (and last?) anniversary of his rise to power, Hitler is in a desperate state.

Judging from the phenomenally swift advance of the Red Army towards Berlin Hitler by now is far from the capital

of the Reich, which, he had announced, will be defended 'stone by stone'.

Wherever he is, Hitler is stewing in his own juice. On the eve of his impending doom, he has none to thank but himself for the way things have come to pass.

Wherever he is, wherever he goes Adolf Hitler will be pursued by a legion more formidable, more inexorable, than Allied bombers or Soviet infantry. He will be pursued by a legion of ghosts. The victims of his bloody rise to power—the Jews, the Socialists, the Communists, the Catholic and Protestant priests, the Intellectuals, the Trade Union workers, the millions of men and women and children in a dozen countries of Europe, who died of his bombs and his bullets and of starvation caused by his blockade; the soldiers, the sailors, the airmen who were killed in a war that he forced upon the world—have risen from their graves and hold the pistol of nemesis aimed at the head of Hitler. He might escape an Allied bullet but, even if he lives to be a hundred on some modern St. Helena, he will not escape the grim spectres that must for ever haunt him.

* * *

The process by which Hitler rose to power and sustained it is a part of world history. Gunther calls it 'The Trick By Fire And The Purge By Blood'. It was an unscrupulous and brutal process. No crime, no lie, no deception, was too great to be discarded if it helped Hitler and the Nazis to climb to power.

But the quick success they had could not have been achieved without the powerful support given by the Prussian capitalists who found in Hitler the pawn they needed to checkmate the spread of Communism in Germany. Doping the common people with promises of economic betterment, Hitler played the capitalists' game by shooting down or imprisoning Communists and Socialists and smashing the trade unions. By the time the people could see the real hideous face of Nazism it was too late. The Gestapo was installed in power and suppressed free thought by an orgy of violence and illegality unsurpassed in the history of tyranny.

Having thus 'liquidated' opposition (even in their own party), the Nazis began the task of putting the minds of the people in chains. A regimentation of all schools and colleges,

a strict censorship, incessant propaganda, parades, demonstrations—all helped to raise a new generation of Germans ‘indoctrinated’ with Nazism and blind worshippers of the Fuehrer.

But there is an international aspect, too, to this ‘How?’ of Hitler’s early triumphs. The reactionary ruling classes of Britain and France and the U.S.A. have played a no mean part in this drama. Fearing Communism like the plague, these plutocrats and capitalists welcomed the rise of Nazism even if Hitler tore up the Treaty of Versailles, re-armed Germany and began grabbing countries like Austria and Czechoslovakia. Anything to keep Hitler appeased so long as he kept the monster of Communism at bay—that seemed to be the guiding policy of the British Conservatives (with a few exceptions of men like Churchill who were sensible enough to realize that Hitler’s plan of world conquest meant not only the suppression of Communism and the U.S.S.R. but also, perhaps, the liquidation of the British Empire).

If Hitler were ever put on trial, his Defence Counsel might cite an embarrassingly big list of eminent witnesses—Lords and Ladies and Knights and Industrial Magnates—to exonerate the accused!

The end of Hitler and his Nazi Germany is a certainty now. It is not the Red Army that today is knocking at the gates of Berlin. It is Doom itself.

But what about Hitlerism—the doctrine of power, the tradition of imperialism? The Nazi empire is crumbling. What about other empires? Hitler’s armies of aggression and occupation face defeat. What about other armies of aggression and occupation that are similarly used to keep down free peoples? Hitler is doomed. What about other Hitlers?

As a man, Hitler was of no consequence—a frustrated house-painter, a renegade, a spy, a demagogue! What made him such a menace to the peace of the world was his transformation into an instrument and a symbol of the forces of greed and power, of exploitation and tyranny, of domination of one nation by another.

I do not know what will be the end of Hitler. I do not know what *should* be the end of Hitler.

I am not interested in the killing of an evil individual but in the killing of an evil idea. Many millions will have died in vain if Hitler is hanged, but Hitlerism allowed to flourish, if Berlin falls, but the citadels of imperialism and exploitation and oppression are left intact, if the gates of Hitler's concentration camps are opened and others kept bolted and barred.

SALUTE TO THE RED ARMY!

—February, 25

We in India are not brought up to have much enthusiasm for the army—any army!

The reason might be sought in the ancient caste system which exempted all but one particular class from military duty and gave the fighters, the Kshatriyas, a status inferior to that of the intellectuals, the Brahmins.

Or it might be the pacifist tradition running like a thread in the rosary of Indian thought all the way from the Buddha to Gandhi.

Or again, it might just be that in the popular mind an army is associated with Conquest and Conquerors.

I recall how, as a child of five or six, I was taken along with a hundred other school boys and made to stand on the roadside for six hours in the broiling sun of a summer day, waiting for a British cavalry column to pass through on the way to Delhi. Those were the days of Martial Law in the Punjab of General Dyer and Jallianwalla Bagh. And such demonstrations of the armed might of the British Empire were supposed to have a sobering and salutary effect on the young minds of schoolboys.

I distinctly remember how we trembled with fear and excitement when the red-faced mounted soldiers rode by, followed by gun-carriages. There were no tanks in those days

not even armoured cars but to boys between five and ten who had never seen even an air-gun in their life, the sight of a machine-gun or a howitzer was frightening enough.

But I doubt if the original intention of the authorities who ordered little boys to be made to stand on the roadside to watch the army ride by was fulfilled. The demonstration did leave an indelible impression on little minds—but not a very happy one, from the point of view of our rulers! Even as the army on horse-back was clattering by, I remember hearing the older boys making seditious remarks about it—under their breath of course!

The rude and arrogant behaviour of some 'Tommies' and Army officers who have a habit of pushing out respectable passengers (including M.L.A.s and Ministers) from First and Second Class railway compartments at the point of a revolver (as revealed in the Assembly) is not likely to foster love for the Army in the hearts of the Indian public.

No, somehow, we don't enthuse over armies—with a few exceptions!

We were quite enthusiastic about the Turkish army that under Enver Pasha and Kemal, fought against European imperialists gleefully preying upon the prostrate body of the 'Sick Man of Europe'.

We watched with admiration and mounting anxiety the plucky fight put up by the bare-footed warriors of Haile Selassie against Mussolini's Black-shirted hordes of mechanized marauders.

Our hearts went out in comradely greetings to the Spaniards when they fought a heroic though losing battle against Hitler's and Mussolini's hirelings fighting under Franco. On our behalf Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru personally carried a message of fraternal good-will to that strangest army in the world's history—the International Brigade—composed of idealists and visionaries, poets and writers, from every corner of the earth, who had all come to defend the liberty of Spain.

The Chinese army of resistance, of course, has had our special sympathy and esteem during the seven-year-old war against the Japanese invaders. It was as a token of this esteem that the Indian National Congress sent a Medical Mission to China, under the leadership of Doctor Atal to work

with the Chinese armies. One of them, Doctor Dwarkanath Kotnis never came back and gave his life for the freedom of China.

But, above all others, we have admired the Red Army of the Soviet Union, for we have known that this is a real people's army, recruited from the workers and peasants; that its soldiers are educated, cultured and politically conscious citizens. This, we have known, is not an army for imperial conquest but for the defence of the workers' Fatherland, and to preserve for them the fruits of the Revolution.

We admire the fortitude and grim determination with which the Red Army defended the Soviet land inch by inch, writing with their blood the immortal sagas of the defence of Leningrad, Stalingrad, Sebastopol. And we admire no less the relentless, almost superhuman, manner in which they have been pursuing the Nazis right to the gates of Berlin. With Berlin will fall into dust the entire edifice of Hitlerian ambitions and Nazi aggression. And the major credit for this triumph will go to the Red Army.

India greets and salutes the Red Army on its 27th anniversary. It would be futile and unworthy of our national self-respect to expect it to fight our battle of freedom for us. But its record stands and shines like a red star to guide those who must tread the path of revolution. Its splendid achievements will for ever remind us that **OUT OF THE PEOPLE** must rise the forces of their liberation.

BLOOD AND WATER

—*March 11*

THE BRITISH EMPIRE IN INDIA IS SAFE.

No, I am not referring to Mr Churchill's gallant determination to 'hold what is ours' and his steadfast refusal to preside over the liquidation of the Empire. I am only referring to a decision of the North-Western Railway Advisory Committee.

A suggestion was made to this Committee by the Indian Social Congress that supplying water to the two communities, Hindus and Muslims, separately be discontinued and that the same water be supplied to both. The suggestion was summarily rejected.

And so cries of '*Hindu pani—Muslim pani*' will continue to ring out at railway stations all over India, and Mr Churchill will continue to rule over 'Britain's estate beyond the seas—the land and the people of Hindustan!'

This '*Hindu pani—Muslim pani*' business is at once the badge of our humiliation and the triumph of our opponents. Starting with the seemingly innocuous division of water on a communal basis, it develops into 'Hindu Colonies' and 'Muslim Towns' and 'For Hindus Only'—'For Parsis Only' boards on buildings, and ends up in the demand for dividing the country itself into Pakistan and Hindustan.

The cry of Pakistan is only an amplified echo of the cry of *Muslim pani*, while the Mahasabhaite slogans are nothing but a projection of the *Hindu pani* cry in the political arena.

That is why the North-Western Railway Advisory Committee has nobly served the interests of Divided India within the Empire. Both the Hindu Mahasabha and the Muslim League should pass resolutions thanking it for upholding their cause—and the British imperialists should heave a sigh of relief. 'Begad, Sir, Lord Beaverbrook is right. But for the British in India, these Hindu and Muslim natives would be drinking the same water today!'

The apologists of Imperialism maintain that the *Hindu pani—Muslim pani* arrangement is maintained because of the caste system and the aversion of the two communities to inter-dining (and 'inter-drinking'?). Is it really impossible to make the average Hindus and Muslims (a few exceptionally orthodox people will always carry their own *Ganga jal* with them) drink water from the same bucket at railway stations? Or has a mechanical distinction created an artificial pattern—the cry of *Hindu pani* causing an involuntary reflex in the mind of a Hindu so that he comes to regard it as only natural that he should take only the 'Hindu' brand of water?

In the days of the Khilafat Non-co-operation agitation, I remember, it used to be a common sight to see Hindus and Muslims fraternizing in the streets and demonstrating the ideals

of unity by publicly drinking water from each other's hands. It was only the *Shuddhi* and *Tabligh* movements which emerged after the suspension of the struggle in 1920 that fostered separatist tendencies.

And yet up to this day, the same water is dispensed to Hindu and Muslim alike at Congress sessions and even at ordinary Congress meetings. At Congress sessions only one kitchen is maintained for all—Hindus and Muslims, Brahmins and Harijans! I have never heard of any objection being taken to it even by the most orthodox.

And some time ago, a war correspondent cabled that when a detachment of Indian troops—Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs—arrived from the front at a rest camp near Cairo the first thing they did was to remove the sign-boards 'Water for Hindus' 'Water for Muslims' which had been put up on drinking water taps. One has only to ask oneself, 'Who put up these boards there—and WHY?' to get the full significance of this story.

Blood is thicker and more important than water—and these soldiers who had shed blood in a common cause knew that! Those other soldiers—soldiers of freedom—also knew it who died for their country—at Amritsar, at Peshawar, at a hundred other spots all over India. The blood of Hindu and Muslim martyrs has mingled and they have become one—in death! Is it too much for us to honour their memory at least by drinking the same water?

LISTEN, UNCLE SAM!

I

—March 18

Remember 'John Doe'?

Remember that poor, deluded idealist (of the Capra film) who thought he would tell his countrymen the truth he had discovered about Big Business? Remember how the wires connecting the microphones with the loud-speakers were cut by the hirelings of Capitalism and his voice prevented from reaching the people?

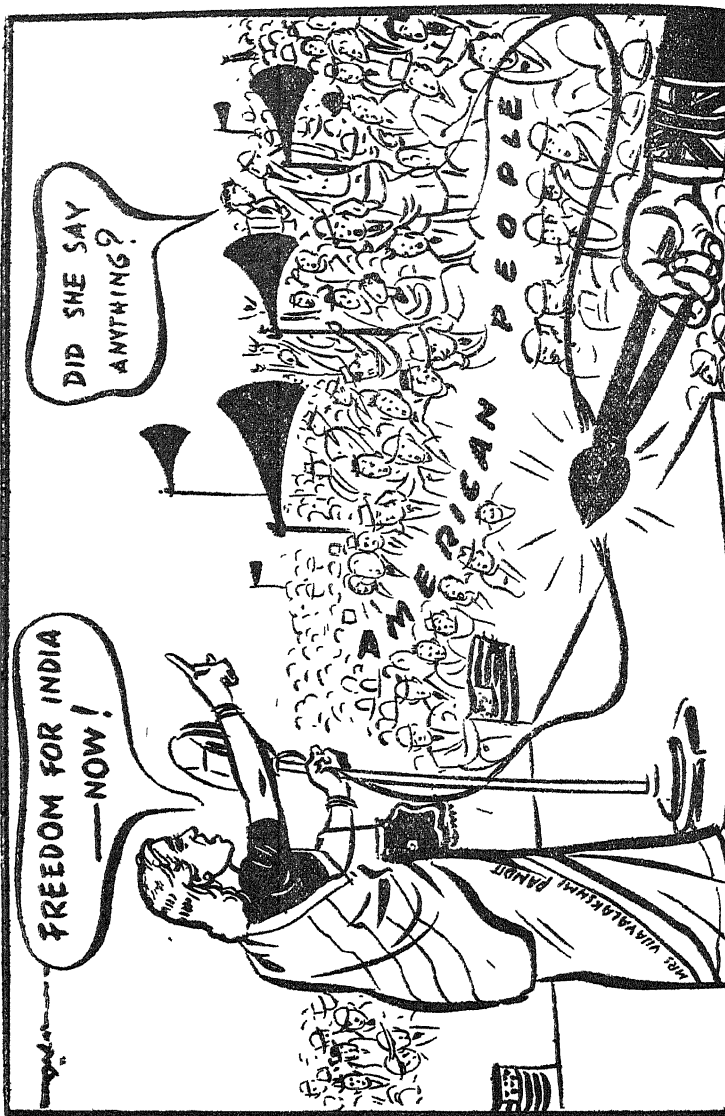
Remember 'Mr SMITH' who went to WASHINGTON—another Capra film? Remember his filibustering in the Senate—the long epic speech through which he wanted to expose and indict the corrupt capitalist Bosses? Remember how the Press Lords boycotted his speech and he was told after he had been on his legs for fifteen hours that not a word of his was being printed by the national Press? Remember that expression of pained surprise on his face when he heard it? Surely such a thing *could not* happen! That is what his silent, frustrated features seemed to say. But it *could* happen, it *did* happen. And it *is* happening again. The John Doe or Mr Smith in this case is—INDIA.

Yes, the wires are cut! The national newspapers of America are in a conspiracy of silence over India. There is a complete BLACKOUT of news about India in the American Press.

This is the opinion of an eminent scientist—not a nationalist agitator but a Knight!—who has just returned from the United States after spending several months there with the Indian Scientists' Delegation.

There is no dearth of newsprint in America, he says. The big New York, Washington and Chicago daily papers still come out with 20 or 24-page issues, four or five editions daily. The *Washington Post* comes out on Sunday morning with 120 pages. And in all these thousands and thousands of columns *there is not an inch space devoted to Indian news.*

I can well believe it. I spent thirty days in the U. S. A. in 1938. Daily I bought an average of four newspapers, each



of which had an average of at least twelve pages—seven columns to a page. I carefully went through all these ten thousand columns and all I found about India was one item of news, about eight or ten lines, shoved into the bottom of an inside page.

But I had imagined the war must have brought about some change for the better, some realization on the part of American newspaper editors that what happens to 400 million Indians—one-fifth of the world's population—is also NEWS! But the situation has remained exactly the same—if anything it is worse!

According to this eminent scientist, the average American newspaper-reader among other things does not know:

That millions of Indians are fighting in this war.

That Indian troops are playing a decisive role in the Burma campaign

That the so-called Government of India has been defeated on innumerable occasions even in an Assembly which has a good proportion of Government-nominated members.

That Congress leaders are staunchly anti-Fascist and that their quarrel with Britain is over Imperialism and not because they are hirelings of Japan.

That the callous apathy and bungling of the Government of India over their food policy precipitated the unprecedented starvation tragedy in Bengal, causing the death of lakhs and complete destitution of many more.

No, Sir, John Bull's good friend Uncle Sam is seeing to it that no such inconvenient facts reach the American public.

On the other hand the British propagandists are ceaselessly busy, receiving every possible encouragement from the Government and the Lords of the U. S. Press and Publishing Houses. According to this scientist, just back from the U. S. A., the sensational revelations made on the floor of the Assembly do not tell the whole story, which is still more sordid. T. A. Raman, the notorious paid agent of the British Ministry of Information, is at large, getting his anti-Indian books published and widely circulated among American civilians and fighting men. And the widely-read *Readers Digest* (circulation in millions) which has made a name for itself as a reactionary and anti-Soviet, anti-Labour, anti-New Deal journal, is coming out with an abridgement of Beverley Nichols's *Verdict on India*, so that this poisonous libel on India should get the widest possible circulation in the U.S.A.

But what about India's friends—Miss Pearl Buck, Dr Lin Yutang, Louis Fischer, Syed Hossain, Sardar J. J. Singh and his India League of America? Aren't they helping to convey the voice of India to the American people? Isn't Mrs Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit doing sterling work in propagating India's cause in America?

The answer is that this is a batch of sincere John Does and Mr Smiths. But the wires are cut! An article may appear in *Asia and Americas*, another in the *New Republic* or *The Nation*. But their circulation of thousands is a drop in the ocean of American newspaper-readers who number several millions.

As for Mrs Pandit, she is no doubt invited by various groups to address them. Her speeches are duly cabled to India and, reading them in our morning papers, we feel satisfied that our voice is at last resounding in America. *But while her speeches are cabled to India and published here, NO REPORTS OF THEM APPEAR IN THE BIG AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS!*

But Mrs Pandit is after all a well-known anti-Imperialist, a rebel in her own country. Even more surprising is the fact, as revealed by the Scientist quoted above, that *no speeches or addresses given by the members of the scientists' delegation sent by the Government of India, were reported by the American Press!* Indeed, I was told, that it became usual with the delegates to preface their speeches at all functions arranged for them with some remarks to this effect: 'We know that what we say to you here is never going to be reported in the great American Press. But since some of you have honoured us with your presence, we shall make a few observations about India that might interest you.'

The significant thing is that while their photographs were printed everywhere there was not a word of their speeches! Why? Because, being true scientists, they refused to become mouthpieces of British propaganda, and uttered a few words here and there which obviously were not relished by the Agent-General in Washington.

So, there you are! Or, rather, where are you?

U. S. Vice-President Harry Truman said on the inauguration of the Associated Press of America's news service in India:

'This unbiased impartial news service should help bridge the broad geographical gap between 130,000,000 Americans and 390,000,000 Indians, and promote better understanding between them.'

It is an excellent sentiment, Mr Truman. But is this 'unbiased, impartial news service' to work only one way? The Indian Press is being flooded with U.S.O.W.I. stuff, besides despatches from the two American news agencies—Associated Press and United Press! What are we getting in return in the American Press? Or are we just suckers?

LISTEN, UNCLE SAM!

II

—*March 25*

Yes, I do think the time has come when we should ask our American 'friends' to show their hand. We do not mind if they hold all the aces, but let's make sure it is not a 'three card trick'!

Let's go into this much-talked-about 'Freedom of Information' business, this American demand for 'free and equal access to the sources of news'.

For years and years, we of the Indian Press have been spoonfed by the Government-subsidized Reuter monopoly of world news. Every day the newsmen of Reuter's have kept us fully informed about the results of football matches played in the cities, towns and villages of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, about the acceptances, prospects and results of every single horse race run anywhere in the British Empire—from Sydney to Ascot—about the state of health and social doings of Britain's nobility and royalty.

It was, therefore, with almost a whoop of joy that we welcomed the establishment in India of American news agencies and the United States Office of War Information. Here, at last, we told ourselves, are impartial, disinterested

and non-imperialistic purveyors of news. Well—are they? Or are we just exchanging Reuter's despatches about football matches with the Associated Press of America's despatches about Baseball matches, Reuter's cabled gossip about British royalty and aristocracy with the United Press of America's cabled gossip about the latest divorce in Hollywood? It is a point worth considering.

For three days and two nights in the week, I work on the *Chronicle* news-desk and have an opportunity of judging the relative merits of the despatches from the different news agencies. And in all fairness, let me confess that I find the American agencies' messages are a shade better than Reuter's stereotyped style of reporting, though (of necessity) their coverage is not yet so exhaustive as the British agency's. In spite of the advantages of the teleprinter, on several occasions Reuter has been beaten by the A.P.A. or U.P.A. on important news-flashes from the war fronts—by a few minutes, though it might be. Also, it must be admitted that both the American agencies are deliberately playing up the 'Indians in the U.S.A.' angle for our satisfaction, and the speeches of Mrs Pandit and the statements of Sardar J. J. Singh are promptly cabled to us. But is that enough?

Let us be frank. The American news agencies and the U. S. O. W. I. are not here merely for idealistic reasons 'to bridge the geographical gap between 130,000,000 Americans and 390,000,000 Indians and promote better understanding between them,' as the U.S. Vice-President would like us to believe! They are here to sell us something—to sell us America, the American way of life, the American movies, American products, from automobiles to lip-sticks, but above all to sell us the idea of looking upon the United States of America as a benevolent Big Brother.

We have been obliging enough. Thanks to the limited resources of most Indian newspapers, we have been gratefully publishing articles, features, photographs and maps from the U.S.O.W.I., flooding our magazine pages with material on American institutions—from the T.V.A. and C.I.O. to M.G.M. and R.K.O. (Nothing, however, about K.K.K.!) We are front-paging news from the American news agencies—about Congressional Acts, Presidential activities, Republican-Democrat wrangles, even about Baseball matches, Hollywood strikes

and awards and matrimonial entanglements—and disentanglements. We are becoming—and making our readers—American-minded in a big way.

But what are we getting in return in the American Press? This is the question that I asked last week and repeat this week. On all evidence, the answer is : Nothing. Or, rather worse than nothing. For, either the great American Press remains completely silent on India or just publishes imperialist lies about India.

The nationalist Press must demand that this one-way traffic in goodwill be ended and replaced by a mutual exchange of really '*Unbiased Impartial*' news—again quoting the U.S. Vice-President.

An American news agency has established its office in the premises of an Anglo-Indian daily. There are reasons to suspect that this is more than a case of geographical contiguity. There are reasons to suspect that the American news agencies depend for news of India on Anglo-Indian newspaper personnel. There are reasons to suspect that this Anglo-Indian-American alliance is sending out news of India not from OUR angle, but the British Government's.

Of course, these may be mere suspicions. It is open to the Associated Press of America and the United Press of America to disprove them by producing for our inspection a file of their despatches from India *as published in American newspapers*! It is open to them to prove to us that the case for Indian freedom has been truthfully reported in the American Press through their despatches. It is open to them—even now—to prove then *bona fides* by getting a clear statement of the Congress position from Gandhiji and then cabling it *verbatim* to American papers. Will they?

We have got to smash through the Anglo-American blockade of truth about India. And this is our opportunity. Let us make it clear to our American friends that we demand *quid pro quo* for our money, for our news-space, for our goodwill and friendship. Let us tell them : 'Your Press has been maintaining silence over India, when not publishing lies about us. We don't want to publish lies about you. But we certainly propose to refrain from giving you any more free publicity *if you do not change your present attitude.*'

In the ultimate analysis, however, I think we shall have to develop our own sources of news, maintain our own correspondents on the news-fronts of the world, have our own news agencies. And for that we must demand equal facilities, that 'equal and free access to the sources of news' that Americans preach but do not themselves practise—not at least so far as India is concerned. It is open to American correspondents to come to India whenever they want. Is it open to Indian correspondents to go to America when they want? It is open to American correspondents to interview Indian leaders whenever they choose. But Indian correspondents wishing to attend the ordinary press conferences of the President must apply through the BRITISH Embassy. Why? Is that what is meant by 'equal and free access to the sources of news'?

It might be argued that in the existing circumstances the American Government can only deal with us through the British Government. But the American Government has established a branch of the U. S. O. W. I. to deal with us of the Indian nationalist Press *directly*. Why could they not supply us their publicity through the Information Department of the British Government of India? Because they want us to treat them differently—and better!—and not to consign the U.S.O.W.I. matter where we generally consign the bromides from New Delhi? Well, then, the arrangement must work in reverse, too. If not, why not?

Speak up, Uncle Sam !

LISTEN, UNCLE SAM!

III

—April 1

'American news agencies do not report India from the Indian angle but only from the view-point of the British Government.'

So says John Lewis, Managing Editor of the New York daily *P.M.*, commenting on and confirming what the LAST PAGE wrote last week.

Indeed, he goes one step further and tells us how this blackout works—at the instance of the British.

'While I hold no particular brief for Press Associations, it is my personal conviction that the reason for this is that sources of information, particularly about India, are controlled by the British, and beyond that British-controlled censorship controls outgoing dispatches.'

In 1943, Mr Lewis added, *P.M.* was forced to reproduce a clipping from a Bombay newspaper to 'show the facts on death' caused by famine.

One needs no further substantiation of the charge made by the LAST PAGE.

P.M. is a radical newspaper—perhaps the only important daily in the world which is free from the capitalistic control of advertisers. It carries no advertisements as it depends for its revenue only on its sales. Its attitude to India has been generally fair, and its views on world affairs are marked by a definitely progressive outlook. It is not surprising, therefore, that *P.M.* should endorse the 'Chronicler's' remarks.

But some other American newspapers have not reacted so favourably, which also is not surprising!

Theodore Thackersey, Managing Editor of the *New York Post* commenting on the LAST PAGE criticism, told the U.P.A. that he believed a large number of newspapers and magazines were 'tremendously interested in India and making a keen effort to understand Indian problems and to present the Indian view-point'. He added that India is getting as good a Press as possible in the U.S.A., in view of the present world situation, tight communication controls and high cable tolls.

'India,' he said, 'is just beginning to let her aspirations be known throughout the world,' and implied that the job of informing the world lay primarily with the Indian Press. Finally, he suggested that the *Bombay Chronicle Weekly* would do better to present its plan for the solution of India's problems than to issue a diatribe against the American press.'

The Foreign Editor of another leading New York paper said his paper gave ample play to all important news from India. This Foreign Editor will not permit his name to be quoted—and no wonder, for one might then check up his statement by going through the files of his paper! He made an important point, however, when he said, '*Little news is coming out of India*'. He further pointed out the war news was overshadowing everything else and that his paper was printing only one-tenth of foreign news not dealing with the war as compared with pre-war days.

I am afraid that while appreciating the quick and friendly response, these explanations do not meet the criticism made by us.

The only way I can be convinced that American newspapers (why drag in the magazines, Mr Thackersey?) are 'tremendously interested' in India is to be shown that the Indian nationalist view-point is finding prominent news-space in the U.S. Press.

The plea of 'world situation' and 'war news overshadowing everything else' does not hold water. For the issue of Indian freedom IS war news, it is one of the most important factors influencing the conduct of the war—and shaping of the peace that will follow it. Has any American newspaper told its readers that in 1942 the Indian National Congress was prepared to throw in the entire weight of the nationalist forces into the anti-Japanese war—IF INDIA WAS DECLARED FREE? Has any American newspaper told its readers that if India were free, and the nation mobilized under the people's leaders, it would not be necessary for boys from Ohio and Illinois and Poughkeepsie in such large numbers to be fighting and dying on the Burma front, because there would be millions of Indians to take their place? Is this not 'war news'? Is this not a matter of vital concern to the American people, to the millions of American mothers praying nightly for the safety of their warrior sons?

Have they been told that so long as Imperialism endures in India, there can be no hope for world peace, and no security for their sons and grandsons? Have they been told of the intense indignation felt in India against the white man's racialism and colour bar?

Have they been told that the so-called 'representatives of India' who are going to attend the San Francisco Conference represent no one except the British Government, that the entire Indian nation has repudiated them? Is this not a vital matter on which the American public must be informed?

Mr Thackersey talks of 'high cable tolls'—and expects us to take him seriously. No one thinks of 'high cable tolls' when baseball results and news of Hollywood divorces are cabled to hundreds of Indian newspapers! The question of high expense does not interfere with the daily flow of unimportant, trivial AMERICAN news to India; it only interferes with the flow of INDIAN news to America!

Tell us another Mr Thackersey!

The anonymous Foreign Editor also says, 'Little news is coming out of India.' Whose fault is that? There are two American news agencies established in India, besides several special correspondents of important newspapers. Are they giving full 'coverage' on Indian news? If not, why not?

It is possible, of course, that British censorship at the cable-head in India, on the one hand, and the high-pressure propagandist machinery maintained by Britain in the U.S.A., on the other, are really responsible for this blackout on Indian news in the American Press. If that is the case, then why not come out in the open and say so—as the *P.M.* editor has done. It is no use talking in innuendoes while clearing one's position. On such a vital, sharp, clear-cut issue—Indian freedom against British Imperialism—one has to choose one side or the other, if one is honest.

As regards Mr Thackersey's 'suggestion'—do we detect an attempt at side-tracking the issue?—that the *Bombay Chronicle Weekly* would do better to present its plan for the solution of India's problems, need one say that the *Chronicle* daily and weekly have been doing that for many, many years? Only Mr Thackersey does not get to read what we write—thanks to the 'communication controls' and 'high cable

tolls'! The opinions of the most obscure American newspapers and columnists are daily cabled to us and published here, but on how many occasions have our views been quoted in the American Press?

Here is a sporting offer from 'Chronicler' to Mr Thackersey or any other American editor or news agency—a free article on THE TRUTH ABOUT INDIA, if he is prepared to publish it. And lest the 'high cable tolls' jeopardize the balance-sheet of the *Post*, I will make it brief—shall we say, a thousand words? *

In view of the millions of words the *Chronicle Weekly* and the LAST PAGE have published on America (U.S.O.W. I. please confirm!), that is not much to expect in return.

THE HOUSE OF LOST SOULS

—April 15

I am writing these lines in the Press Gallery of the Legislative Assembly. This is an ideal place to do a spot of work: The cushioned seat is comfortable, the desk is neat and uncluttered, there is no telephone to disturb one's peace, and the Bores (thank heavens!) cannot penetrate to this august sanctum sanctorum. Also it is convenient to be on the spot because I propose to write this week about—the Assembly!

Looking down upon the House (I mean, literally, not necessarily metaphorically) one sees a vast panorama of venerable heads—mostly bald heads! To borrow the language of fashion writers, white is the dominant colour motif of the hirsute adornment, with grey and platinum blonde also in evidence. Flowing, white patriarchal beards; snow-white fringes round polished egg-bald heads; white moustaches and whiskers; grey imperials and goatees; bushy white

* Needless to say, the offer was never accepted.

eyebrows; prickly-white stubbles; long white hair rolled up under Sikh turbans; white sacred tufts hidden under orthodox Hindu caps; the sleekly-parted simple grey 'hair do' of the solitary slim lady in the House.

Age is undoubtedly the most distinctive mark of this eleven-year-old Assembly (originally elected in 1934)—the oldest in the whole world. The average age of the members should be much above fifty, and the few youthful faces look strangely out-of-place in the hoary assemblage. Age makes itself felt not merely in white and grey hair, but one can sense it also in the bent backs, the tired looks, the sleepy voices and the antediluvian ideas that often find expression in this House. The Speaker of the Assembly, Sir Abdur Rahim, is so old that a microphone has been installed to carry his frail voice to the members on the back benches and to the galleries. Without it he would be perfectly inaudible. Indeed, he cannot stand the strain of the long sittings, and for almost half the time every day he yields his place to his Deputy.

One M. L. A. has already died on the floor of the House during this session, another had a severe heart attack during a sitting some days ago. As I write this, I can see at least two old dignitaries fast asleep in their seats. It is not that they are dozing off because of a hectic late night. Nor is this the normal after-lunch siesta. This is the somnolent tranquillity of old age. They simply cannot keep their eyes open. Indeed, the slouch is the most general posture. The venerable majority finds it difficult to sit erect with straight backs, and they adopt comic positions to find repose on the cushioned benches that certainly were not designed for the purpose of sleeping. (Even the younger members seem to be learning these lazy habits from the veterans, and I can see a young M.L.A. from Sind sprawled across his bench.) Altogether there is a sleepy, death-like atmosphere in which the monotonous, inaudible drone of some back bencher sounds like the mumbling chant of a priest at a tomb. Nobody seems to be interested—perhaps not even the speaker himself.

Some more members have decided to take a nap, others have just lazily closed their eyes, some are draped over their seats in an attitude of relaxation, a few can be seen talking to one another in whispers, two are leaving—to have a cup of tea, perhaps.

And then something happens to rouse them all. Sleepy eyes come wide open with interest. The sprawlers correct their postures and sit erect. Some even condescend to listen to the speaker, while keeping an eye on the—guess whom?—white-clad peon who has entered with a bundle of crisp Reserve Bank cheques to distribute their allowances to the M.L.A.s'

* * * *

This is the House of Lost Souls, no doubt. One does not have to travel all the way to New Delhi to be convinced of the futility of legislative activity in a House that has been reduced to a second-rate debating society and has no power to influence the decisions of the imperialist regime that rules through an irresponsible Executive

But the people down below have names and faces and voices. Some of these names are—or *were*—respected in the country. Many of these faces are familiar, some are even popular. Some of these voices are powerful and find an echo throughout the length and breadth of India when they are raised in support of Freedom and Unity, and in denunciation of Imperialism and exploitation.

* * * *

While I have been scribbling all this, some sort of debate has been going on down below. It was not much of an exciting affair and I have not missed much. Most of the members are still drowsy with sleep. One of them is consulting the Cinema advertisements in the daily paper. Eyes are every now and then turned towards the clock. Most of the Government members have slipped away. I try to catch what the speaker is speaking about. Something about the Kumbh Mela and lack of railway facilities for pilgrims. A Sikh member follows and refers to the Nankana Sahib Fair. A Muslim member gets up and complains about lack of facilities for Haj pilgrims and visitors to Ajmer. The Railway Member gets up to speak, atrociously mispronounces all the Indian names he mentions.

It is a dull moment—but in its dullness it is more representative of the futility and frustration of the Assembly sessions. Hardwar, Nankana Sahib, Ajmer, Haj, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs. And an English man who mispronounces Indian names—who pronounces Hardwar as if it were

'Hardwar!'—and will not run pilgrim specials, thought he continues to run race specials. This is the Assembly! This is India! Even I feel sleepy.....

OUR LOCAL GESTAPO

—April 29

Akbar Allahabadi, the famous Urdu satirical poet, once said that next to the fear of God there were two other fears that beset one's life in India—*Mazmoon-nigar biwi ka C.I.D. ka dar*! (The fear of a wife who contributes articles to the papers, and the fear of the C.I.D.)

Not all of us are blessed (?) with *mazmoon-nigar biwi*, but most of us have to content with the C.I.D. at one time or another. Indeed, even the remotest connexion with any sort of political activity is sufficient to have a private dossier opened to one's name at the local C.I.D. headquarters. The initials, as you might know stand for Criminal Investigation Department. The 'criminals' whom this department keeps on investigating include not only Congressmen, Socialists, Communists, Trade Unionists, Kisan Sabha organizers and student leaders, but also lawyers professors, artists, businessmen, even film stars, who might have revealed some sort of an interest in the freedom movement.

Those who talk of the great latitude allowed to political workers in India know nothing of the wide powers and all-embracing activity of the C.I.D. It may not be as efficient and ruthless as the Nazi Gestapo, but it is not such an innocuous 'welfare organization', either.

What exactly are the powers and scope of activity of the C.I.D.? No one seems to know. When I was a college student, staying at home in the vacation, I found myself followed by a suspicious-looking man whose furtive manner loudly proclaimed what he was. It was amusing at first, and I used to entertain myself on dull evenings, by going to the

station and buying a ticket for Calcutta or Bombay or Madras. Within a few minutes the 'shadow' too would be rushing to get a *chalaan* to travel to that distant destination. When the train arrived I would get into a compartment and the 'shadow' into another. When it started I would jump down from the other side, go back to the Booking Office and get a refund on the ticket—minus an anna! It was worth that much when next day I encountered the harassed C.I.D. fellow and he reacted as if he had seen a ghost. After a while, however, it goes to be a bore and I had to report to the local Superintendent of Police—a young Englishman with a sense of humour—against this unwanted 'escort'. After he had heard the whole story he laughed a great deal over it and promised to leave me alone. But, alas, not all Police officers possess a sense of humour and even if they do, it does not survive a few years in the 'force'.

As I was saying, what *are* the powers of the C.I.D.? I want to know, for instance, if a C.I.D. officer has the right to go to an employer and say, 'Look, you are employing a Communist. We advise you to get rid of him'—as was done in a recent case! (Only, this particular Communist happened to be 'her', and not 'him') So long as the Communist Party is legal, there is no law against employing a Communist—or is there? Will the local Gest—sorry C.I.D. Chief oblige with an answer?

And while he is making up his mind not to do so, let me tell you an utterly delicious C.I.D. story.

This again happened during my University days ten years ago. The Viceroy was due to visit us in a week's time. Preparations were afoot—cleaning and white-washing and scraping and polishing. Bunting and flags, and the rest of it. The 'rest of it' included some suspicious fellows loitering about the hostels—without any ostensible means of livelihood. One of them came prowling around our hostel, and conversation to this effect took place between him and a hefty student with well-known nationalist sentiments:

'Hey, you, who are you?'

'Oh, nobody in particular!'

'Are you a C.I.D. man?'

'Oh, no!'

‘All right then, I suspect that you are a terrorist, and as the Viceroy is due shortly we cannot take any risks. So I propose to hand you over to the police.’

Without much ado he was seized by half a dozen tough sportsmen, given a fairly strong dose of spanking, then locked up in a bath-room. After a few hours he was heard proclaiming that he was a C.I.D. Sub-Inspector. But the students said, ‘We don’t believe you.’ In the afternoon the Police Inspector was informed that a ‘suspicious’ man had been caught red-handed and he came running, hoping to get a Rai Bahadurship for catching a notorious bomb-thrower. He only got—a comrade of his!

I don’t think that particular C.I.D. man ever went prowling around a college hostel again.

MORAL. If you are in the C.I.D. better say so in the first place.

HITLER IS DEAD BUT.....

—May 6

HITLER IS DEAD! MUSSOLINI IS DEAD! LET ALL OTHER HITLERS AND MUSSOLINIS BEWARE!

The Nazis said, ‘The German nation would not dream of having its leader shot by some inferior human being.’ And yet he was shot by a Bolshevik bullet or a British bomb—and so he died!

Goebbels, the Nazi arch-propagandist, said: ‘We know where we (Nazis) began, but only God knows where we will one day end.’ But now we know!

And Julius Streicher, the Nazi, said, ‘I am convinced that when the Leader passes into eternity the Supreme Judge will not have to judge long, but will open Heaven to him.’ One does not have to know the Admission Rules of Heaven, or even to believe in it, to be convinced that Julius Streicher was an optimist!

Adolf Hitler once asked, 'Upon whom did we inflict a single injury, or from whom have we taken his possessions?'

Now that Hitler has joined the legion of the dead, they will no doubt be able to enlighten him.

Adolf Hitler said: 'It is the duty of Nazis to cling steadfastly to our aims in foreign policy, and these are to assure to the German nation the territory which is due to it on this earth.'

And some one said, 'We propose to hold what is ours... I have not become what I am to liquidate my Empire.' No, it was NOT Adolf Hitler!

Gobbels, that master propagandist, anticipated this LAST PAGE and put on record his devastating reply in advance—eight years ago:

'If the Fuehrer decides to make world history, how can an inferior quill-driver in some editorial chair presume to interfere?'

Yes, indeed, how can he? How dare he?

* * * *

Face to Face with such a supreme tragedy it might sound callous to say, 'I told you so!' But that is what the original anti-Nazis—the Communists, the Socialists the Leftists, the Trade Unionists, the Indian Congressmen—can say to the British and American propagandists who are using up all the adjectives in describing the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps. 'The sadism of the Nazis,' says the U.S.O.W.I. caption to a photo, has been revealed to a shocked and incredulous world...The truth is here. The story is told now.'

The story is told NOW? You are wrong. U.S.O.W.I. The story was told years before, in books, in pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, pictures. Need one mention a few books published years ago? *Hitler Puts the Clock Back!* *The Brown Book of Hitler Terror!* *Days of Contempt!* *Education for Death!* *Hitler the Pawn!* Yes, the story was there for the world to read and to be warned. But at that time it did not suit the diplomatic purposes of the British and American Governments to make such exposures known to the world. Such book were rejected by the big publishing firms, their authors were pursued and spied upon by the Secret Police and the C.I.D. Anti-Nazism was almost tantamount to treason.

In India, much before the National War Front pamphleteers and the 800-rupee-a-month Information Officers of the Government of India began their anti-Nazi propaganda crusade, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had warned his countrymen against the 'evil bent and distorted intent' of Hitler, the 'sickening lies and barbarism of the high priests of Nazism', their 'new standards in cruelty and inhumanity.'

No, we don't have to be propagandized about the Nazi atrocities. They were being committed—and we knew it then and we said it then—when Halifax was stag-hunting with Goering, when Hoare was making his dirty deal with Mussolini, when Chamberlain was having friendly talks with Hitler at Munich.

It was a good idea to send parties of British M. P.s and American politicians to inspect the evidence of horrors discovered at the concentration camps in occupied Germany. But it is a pity that the list does not include the names of certain dignitaries who could have profited a great deal from such a visit—for example :

The Honourable L. S. AMERY, who said in 1937 : 'We cannot afford to pursue any policy which would bring us into conflict with Germany, Italy and Japan' ;

Mr. BEVERLEY BAXTER, M. P., who declared in 1938 : 'We are very foolish in this House, those of us who refuse to believe that there is any good in National Socialism, or that there is no unselfishness in men like Hitler and Goering' ; and

Sir THOMAS MOORE, M. P., who was once quite certain that 'peace and justice are the key-words of Hitler's policy.....Give Hitler a chance: I am satisfied Herr Hitler is absolutely honest and sincere.'

Well, Imperialism and Capitalism did give Hitler a chance—and, look, how 'absolutely honest and sincere' he proved to be !

V—E DAY MONTAGE

—May 13

The lonely prisoner looked out through the narrow grill that served as a window in his dark solitary cell. The sky was studded with stars. How very far they seemed—those luminous little worlds! They said there was life on these stars and these planets and he wondered if there, too, they had prisons and detention camps and solitary cells and gallows.

In the deep, all-pervading silence of the night, suddenly he heard voices. He could not say whether it was the radio in the jailer's bungalow going full blast, or a crowd of people shouting something, or both, or neither, but something else altogether. But his ears, trained by months of enforced solitude to catch the faintest whisper, vibrated like a well-strung instrument at the impact of one little word: FREEDOM.

Freedom! Someone was saying something about freedom. Someone else was saying something about VICTORY—and PEACE! Then he understood. The war in Europe was over. Peace had returned to earth after five years of the bloodiest war in history. And though he was not a religious person at all, he muttered, 'Thank God!' For he had all along hated Fascism and Nazism and felt one with their victims—Manchuria, Abyssinia, Spain, China, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, one by one the lights of liberty going out all over the world. And, far away in India, he had felt the gloom deepening in his own dwelling—for the world was his home and every man his brother! Thank God that the tyrants had been dethroned and their arrogance trampled into the dust! Thank God, the torturers and the sadists and the oppressors had been caught at last and brought before the jury of the world conscience for the punishment that was their due! Thank God, the gates of the concentration camps were being flung open.....Or were they?

The smile froze on the lips into a mockery of joy. The light went out of the eyes. A hand, reaching out towards the stars, hit the iron grill.

The young Programme Assistant of All-India Radio had been kept awake on three consecutive nights preparing the Victory Day programmes. And then the great moment had come. He felt a delicious thrill doing this work—for was he not making history by announcing to the world at large, and to his own country in particular, the glad tidings of Victory, of Peace of Freedom? He and his colleagues had done a good job of it. They had broadcast the news in prose and in poetry, with and without music; they had announced it, elaborated it, analysed it, broadcast comments on it; they had reported in detail the celebrations in other lands; they had paid tributes to the Soldiers, the Sailors, the Airmen, the men at the machines, the war leaders, diplomats, statesmen; they had sung of Allied victory and of the defeat of Nazism. They had quoted formidable facts and awe-inspiring figures, they had recalled historic phrases—'blood, toil, sweat and tears'. And, to add space to the programme, they had interrupted the programme every few minutes to put on the air the bars of some stirring melody. The song that had been played most was 'The land of Hope and Glory', and, indeed, as he returned home after three sleepless nights, the young Programme Assistant heard its echoes in the steady clop-clop-clop of the victoria.

Trying not to fall asleep, he enquired of the victoria-driver, 'Did you hear the programme?'

'Programme? What programme, Sahib?' asked the driver.

'Why, the Victory Programme, of course! Didn't you hear the news on the radio?'

'No, Sahib, I didn't. But what has happened?'

'Why, don't you know the war is over?'

'Oh, it is, is it?'

And then the gharry-wallah smacked the droway horse with his whip and burst into *Merry leze jehan men ckan hai-na qarar hai*.

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ON V-E DAY IN INDIA

The people of Bihar were worried about the health of their beloved leader, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, still languishing in ail.

The Government published the report of the Bengal Famine Inquiry Commission admitting the loss of 1,500,000 lives due to governmental bungling.

Notices extending their period of detention by six months were served by the Government on Sardar Vallabhai Patel and Shankarrao Deo, members of the Congress Working Committee.

Ten thousand semi-naked people from villages marched to the Sub-Divisional Magistrate's office in Meherpur (Nadia) to protest against cloth scarcity.

V-E DAY in Bombay was Drinking Day.

The amount of brandy, whisky, gin, vermouth, champagne sherry and cocktails imbibed in a single evening would have been enough to float a battleship.

The soldiers, armed with their bottles of brandy and half bottles of gin, were trying to forget the horrors of war with the traditional formula of 'wine, women and song'.

But what were the others—the shark-skin-and-gold-border-sori brigade—trying to forget? Were the contractors trying to forget the millions they had made out of war contracts? Were the Black Market operators, the speculators, the profiteers, trying to forget that they had made the bloodiest war in history the occasion to make their piles of gold? Were 'Society' games trying to forget the minor thrills of war-time peccaadillos? Were the film stars celebrating those alleged 'war propaganda' films they had helped to make to win the war? Were the horse-owners, the jockeys, the bookies, the punters, drinking to forget the millions they had lost and won and lost again at Mahaluxmi? Were the Burra Sahibs—and the Brown Burra Sahibs and Mem Sahibs—drinking to celebrate the end of a war they had fought in air-conditioned offices and luxurious boudoirs?

The disorderly revels of the soldiery might be banal but can be understood and forgiven at a moment like this. For they have looked in the eyes of danger, and to them the end of war means all the difference between life and death. But how shall we excuse the nauseating spectacle of bloated money-bags wining and dining and dancing to celebrate a victory won by the sweat and blood of others?

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V—E DAY was Flag Day. There were flags on Government offices, flags on the Town Hall flags on churches, flags on banks, flags on prisons, flags even dangling from brothel windows.

Bansa flags. Brush flags! British flags! American flags. French flags. Dutch flags. Belgian flags. Czech flags. Polish flags. Here and there—as it by mistake—even the Red flag of the Soviet Union.

There was only one flag, however, NOT to be seen—the INDIAN flag

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The stars had begun to melt into the dark red sky of the hour before dawn. Yet the prisoner still stood looking out of the barred window, lost in fathomless thought. It was dark all round, but a little flame burned within him, lighting the recesses of the soul. And, as he thought of this war and how it had been fought and won, a peculiar sense of calm satisfaction possessed him. True, the war had meant untold violence and misery for millions. True, the cause of freedom and justice had not triumphed everywhere yet. True, he and many like him were still in prisons. But in the gloom of war there had been bright spots too—the heroism of the common people of Russia and China, of France of Poland, even of Britain and America, the new sense of universal solidarity, the new ideals of freedom and brotherhood to which even imperialists and exploiters were forced to pay at least lip-service. The yeast of humanity was in ferment. The PEOPLE were on the march. Two major tyrannies had been overthrown, others could not survive for long. The gates of hundreds of concentration camps had been flung open, others could not be kept barred and locked for ever.

The eastern horizon was streaked with silver. Soon it would be dawn. The night of tyranny was slowly, inevitably, drawing to a close.

THE MEN IN POLICE FILES

—May 20

Mr. Amery's son has been proved to be a Fascist.

The Secretary of State for India should thank his stars that his Defence of India Rules do not apply to himself. Otherwise, he would have lost his job, his house would have been searched, he would have been called to the police station for an interrogation, the C. I. D. would have trailed him. That is, of course, if in this case having a Fascist son had not been regarded as sufficient grounds for imprisonment and whipping.

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You can go back into history as far as you like and you find the same phenomenon—the dreamers, the idealists, the philosophers, the scientists, the architects of nations and founders of republics, rebels and redeemers, wasting away precious years of their lives in prisons and torture chambers, sometimes even losing their lives at the orders of the contemporary powers-that-be.

The crucifixion of Christ has become a part of religious legend, but it was one of the earliest revolts against tyranny—'unsuccessful', from the worldly view-point, because the leader was tried, sentenced and executed, but really successful, because it changed the entire course of human history.

Earlier than that, Socrates, one of the greatest philosophers that ever lived, had to pay with his life for expressing ideas that ran counter to the Defence of Greece Act—or whatever law prevailed in his days! I wonder if the Romans and the Greeks had some early version of 'Police files' but, I have no doubt that if the system had been in vogue at that time, the names of Christ and Socrates would have been duly entered there—along with photographs (front and profile), finger-prints and characteristic birth-marks for identification?

Not, no often the 'men in the Police files' have turned the tables on their prosecutors and persecutors. Mazzini, for long a refugee from justice, lived to be the founder of the Italian Republic. Juarez (remember the Paul Muni film?) the arch-rebel, became the President of Mexico and condemned to

death the same Emperor who had once set a price on his head! De Valera, who today dares to defy the great Churchill and, only a few years ago, was occupying the presidential chair at the League of Nations at Geneva, was long 'wanted' by the British Police. His 'Police file' no doubt, still exists in the archives of Scotland Yard.

The case of Stalin (as well as of some of his Bolshevik comrades) of course, comes to mind most vividly, because of the pre-eminent position enjoyed by him in the international affairs of today.

'Bolshevism', it used to be said by Bolsheviks 'has peopled half the jails of Europe with philosophers.' Stalin, like Lenin, was one of these philosophers. He was also one of those revolutionaries who were described by Mr Churchill as 'cut-throats' and 'scum of the earth' when the Bolsheviks seized power.

Mr Churchill was horrified to observe an 'ex-Middle Temple lawyer and seditious, half-naked fakir striding up the stairs of the Viceregal Lodge' as an invited guest of His Majesty's representative in India! How much more horrifying the spectacle of the King-Emperor's Prime Minister flying to Yalta at the orders of one of those bomb-throwing Bolshevik 'cut throats'?

But the Police file listing him as a criminal remains on record and ought to be preserved—for it has an enduring message and moral for the world. And the moral is this: Don't be too hard on the man on the Police files. For tomorrow he might become the ruler of his country and you might have to kotow to him no end!

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Today, in India every C. I. D. office maintains 'secret files' of thousands of people who have no criminal tendencies unless patriotism and love of their fellow beings be counted among criminal tendencies. These include, besides world-famous national leaders, tens of thousands of Congress workers, Trade Union organizers, Kisan Sabha workers, politically active students, States People organizers, communists, Socialists of all shades, Kilafatists, Ahrars, Khaksars, and even those engaged in 'harmless' constructive work like khadi and Harijan uplift. Who knows how many Lenins, how

many, Stalin and Molotov, are listed for the files of the Indian C.I.D. ?

These police files are a Damocles sword dangling over every patriot and believer in social justice. These police files are a menace to our civil liberties. It is a pity, indeed that the Congress Ministries, when they came to power in 1937, did not order a public bonafire of these files. Let us hope it will be one of the first acts of the National Government when it comes.

Meanwhile, let Mr Churchill, and Mr Amery, too, contemplate the facsimile of the Stalin 'Police file' and learn a lesson. They are asking Azad and Nehru and their followers to withdraw the August resolution to come out of jail. So were the Communists expecting Stalin and the Bolsheviks to renounce and recant Communism. Did Stalin seek release from his Arctic prison by withdrawing the revolutionary resolutions of the Bolshevik Party? No, And, look, where is he today? And look, where are those who ordered that he be listed on the Police files?

· IF THOU WOULDST NOT FIGHT ·

—May 27

I have nothing but respect for the lofty purpose of the Ramakrishna Mission which has been doing so much to spread knowledge of Hindu religion and philosophy in America. But I have reasons not to be too enthusiastic about the many sophisticated recruits to Vedanta found in and around Hollywood—including Aldous Huxley and Christopher Isherwood.

The soulless materialism of America has no doubt created a spiritual void in the lives of the American people. Those among them who have plenty of money and little work to do naturally feel jaded and frustrated, finding the senseless pursuit of sensuous pleasure inadequate to give them

real happiness. They, especially the elderly women, are ready to fall for the first dealer in the spiritual—genuine or fake, Hindu or Muslim, Christian revivalist or Yoga expert, Theosophist or Jehovah's witness. All around Los Angeles are quaint churches and shrines and spiritual centres, and many a so-called Swami does flourishing business. I have visited some of these 'temples' and seen the 'exercises in ecstasy' performed there, and my impression was that it was more a case of neurosis than of spiritual exaltation. A Freudian psycho-analysis of the matronly million-dollar heiresses who frequent these temples and shrines would produce sensational results. It is not without significance that at Isherwood's Ashram there should be eight women to three men!

Both Huxley and Isherwood present a familiar case of escapism. Sensitive artists as they are, they could not face and fight the grim reality of Fascist aggression and took refuge—both in a physical and ideological sense—in the Los Angeles Ashram, far away from the flying bombs and from the bitter conflict that raged in the mind and heart of every honest intellectual. It was not easy for such pacifists and aesthetes to reconcile themselves to the horror and destruction of war. They were not prepared to fight, yet they were not strong enough (like Ethel Mannin's 18-year-old daughter) to declare themselves conscientious objectors. They had been condemning Fascism all along, but when it came to defending their country against Fascist barbarism, they fled. In the serene wisdom of the Vedanta they claim to have found the solution of their problem, besides peace of mind and comfort for their tormented souls. Both of them have been greatly impressed and influenced by the *Bhagavad-Gita*. They have translated and published it. But arent these escapists from the anti-Fascist struggle mis-reading the Song of the Lord, which was originally addressed to one like them 'lost in the faintness of (his) heart', whose mind too, was 'confused with doubts'? For this is what the Lord spoke 'to him who stood sorely aggrieved in the midst of the armies:'

'Moreover, having regard for thine own duty, thou shouldst not tremble, for there cannot be anything more welcome to a warrior than to fight in a righteous war.....

‘But if thou wouldst not fight, thou wouldst be guilty of having abandoned thy duty and—throwing away thy glory.....’

‘OUR MOTHER AND OUR SISTER’

—May 27.

Americans are not used to women (except film stars) being prominent in their own right. They have had only one woman in the National Cabinet (Frances Perkins, the Labour Secretary) in the entire history of their Republic. Women among America’s political leaders are very rare indeed. Seven years ago at Poughkeepsie, near New York, when this reporter asked Mrs Roosevelt if there was a chance of a woman becoming President of the U. S. A. she was shocked, and perhaps thought the question to be a joke in bad taste.

To Americans, Mrs. Pandit must appear a strange phenomenon—a charming woman who is a front-rank political leader, brilliant orator, and was Minister in the Government of her province! One of the three greatest living Indian women, she is the third among them to visit the U. S. A. Mrs Sarojini Naidu went on a lecture tour of the States over a decade ago, holding audiences spell-bound with her famed oratory, and doing much to undo the harm done to India’s prestige by Katherine Mayo’s libel on a nation, *Mother India*. Kamladevi was the second to go there, and she lectured from coast to coast, at a time when (at the beginning of this war) India and the Congress were being misrepresented and viciously slandered by British Propagandists. Her lectures coincided with a series arranged for Mr. Duff Cooper, and, on more than one occasion, this eloquent ex-prisoner was able completely to confound the British Minister by her sharp and incisive exposures of Britain’s imperial policies.

But neither Mrs. Naidu nor Kamladevi was in America at such an opportune moment as Mrs. Pandit. Her presence in America at the time of the San Francisco conference was a lucky stroke of chance, and she has made the best use of this opportunity. No doubt, Indian patriots in the States, too, would have voiced India's aspirations at San Francisco, but it is unlikely that anyone would have done it better and created a more effective impression. There is something both heroic and glamorous in so charming a woman standing up to champion the cause of her country's freedom which cannot but appeal to the American people's strong sense of drama. In the picturesque, sari-draped figure of Vijaya Lakshmi, 'Mother India' must assume a newer and more impressive aspect in the imagination of the average American who has hitherto been doped by Katherine Mayo's grisly stories of Devadasis and widows with shaven heads.

Both Sarojini Naidu and Kamladevi rose to their present country-wide prominence, unaided, by their own personal achievements in the intellectual and political fields. Neither of them had the advantage of a ready-made family reputation. Vijaya Lakshmi's case was different. She was born of a great father, Motilal Nehru, and is lucky to have an elder brother like Jawaharlal whose reflected glory can illuminate many a life around him. (The ties of family loyalty are stronger among the Nehrus than in many other prominent families). With an honoured family name, however, Vijaya Lakshmi also inherited a tradition of national service and sacrifice. It is because she followed this tradition, and not because she is Motilal's daughter and Jawaharlal's sister, that she rose to her present high position among the front-rank leaders of her country. To this one must also add the qualities of quick intelligence and an almost manly grit that she possesses in abundance. She ascribes it to the 'fighting blood' transmitted from some obscure ancestor, and others call it 'the Nehru temperament' which relishes a fight. More than once she has shocked Orthodoxy by her unconventional outlook on life. Like her father and brother, she has daring, physical and moral, a flair for adventure, and a capacity for hard work, besides the social graces of a culti-

vated and sophisticated woman. She is as at home on the political platform as in a drawing room..

And she has CHARM—in capital letters!—which is not just good looks but has something to do with a flame-like personality, vital and vibrant. Lin Yutang, who stayed as a guest of Mrs. Pandit at Anand Bhawan, asked me at a meeting her, 'Tell me, is Mrs. Pandit regarded as a beautiful woman in India?' And when I replied, 'Of courser, he added, 'She would be regarded as beautiful anywhere in the world. But she is more than beautiful. She is CHARMING.' I think Mrs. Pandit's charm lies in a subtle combination of a masculine intelligence and a variegated interest in life, with an essentially feminine grace. Neither the hurly-burly of politics nor the high office of Minister (in which she was eminently successful) could kill the woman in her. On the day she assumed her Ministerial duties, she shocked her Secretaries by asking for a bowl of roses to be placed on her table. Applicants and interview-seekers who went to see her at home were often embarrassed to find the 'Honourable Minister' busy plying a sewing machine on the verandah or busy with a pair of pruning scissors in the garden. In jail she did her own cooking—and planted a flower-and-vegetable garden!

In her book *So I Became A Minister*, she relates an incident when, during election time, she entered a railway compartment which was already occupied by an Indian student and an American tourist who were talking about the election. Without recognizing the fair intruder, they started discussing her chances for the local seat. The student was loud in her praise, which provoked the American to ask what she had done to deserve such eulogies. 'Done?' the enthusiastic boy almost screamed. 'She does not have to do anything. She is our mother and our sister and she will win!'

She is still 'our mother and our sister and she will win'—but also she has DONE a lot!

LAND OF LIBERTY ?

—June 26'

*Ye sons of France, awake to glory,
Hark, hark, what myriads bid you rise,
Your children, wives, and grandsires hoary,
Behold their tears and hear their cries !
Shall hateful tyrants mischief breeding,
With hireling hosts, a ruffian band,
Affright and desolate the land,
While peace and liberty lie bleeding ?*

—LA MARSEILLAISE

France is one country but two traditions. One is the tradition of Rousseau and Voltaire, of Lafayette, Proudhon, and Jean Jaures, of the Paris Commune and the Barricades, of the Revolution, of Emile Zola and Eve Curie and Romain Rolland, of artists, musicians, painters, sculptors, scientists, rebels and revolutionaries, friends and upholders of liberty everywhere in the world.

The other is the tradition of the Bourbons, Louis XIV and Marie Antoinette, of the world-mastery ambitions of Napoleon, of advancing French imperialism in the East and entrenched French capitalism at home, of Devil's Island and the Dreyfus persecution, of Jew-baiting, of oppression over Arabs and Negroes in Africa, of the prostitution of art, of the degradation of politics by self-seeking politicians, of an effete and corrupt ruling class, of the *Comite de Force* and the Cagoulaards, and the 200 Families Who Own The Bank Of France That Owns The Country And People Of France.....

The history of France is the story of the conflict between these two Frances—progressive France against Reactionary France, Leftist France against Rightist France, France the Republic against France the Empire.

The Syrian crisis, occurring as it did on the heels of the phenomenal recovery of their self-respect and freedom by the people of France, clearly proves that with the resurrection of

the Republic, the Empire, too, has got a new lease of life. And so long as this germ of imperialism survive swithin the body politic of the French Republic, the question mark will persist—'Land of Liberty?'

In 1940 France, after a far-from-glorious resistance, fell to Hitler's conquering hordes and became a part of the Greater Reich. It had no greater status in the international world at that time than India has today, and Petain was as much a representative of Free France as Noon is of Free India. At one stroke France lost both her freedom and her Empire, thus forfeiting even the solitary excuse for imperialism, that it protects the subject peoples.

Many reasons have been advanced for the fall of France. It is well known that Chamberlainism was rampant, but in France it was less excusable than in Britain; for France was Germany's next-door neighbour and first potential victim. But the entire political life of France was corrupt to the core. Blum's United Front efforts had failed. the pro-Fascist Rightists were openly undermining the national will to resist. There was an atmosphere of frustration and defeatism. No wonder the Maginot Line crumpled like nine-pins and the jackbooted robots of Hitler were seen parading on the Champs Elysees. It was the greatest humiliation in French history.

But with the fate of France was also linked up the fate of her Empire and mandates—millions of people tied to the apron-strings of the Republic. The French not only lost *their* freedom but also caused the transfer of the destiny of these millions from one master to another. With the exception—for a few weeks—of the smallest colony, French Somaliland, all the administrations of all other French Colonies went Petainist, that is, accepted the overlordship of Hitler. That is how the great imperial power fulfilled her obligation of trusteeship of millions of Asiatics and Africans—by turning them over to Messrs Hitler, Mussolini and Tojo. Syria was saved from going into Nazi hands by a timely invasion by the British (helped by a token force of the Free French) who fought and defeated the Petainist forces.

In the home country itself, barring an infinitesimal minority of Communists and radical patriots, working under-

ground, the vast mass of Frenchmen had accepted the humiliating reality of defeat.

Of course, meanwhile, General (than Colonel) de Gaulle had raised the flag of Free France in London, but he received substantial moral support from the French people *after* Britain had belied Petain's expectations by holding on under the *blitz*, particularly *after* the historic Russian resistance had completely upset the Hitlerian apple-cart. And while the record of the Maquis and the French underground has been creditable, indeed, it bears no comparison, for instance, with the grim prolonged resistance of Tito's guerillas in Yugoslavia or the Elás in Greece. If France was able to regain her freedom from Nazi rule it was mainly due to the help given directly by Britain and America and, still more decisive, the help indirectly given by the Soviets.

The point I wish to make, however, is this: No sooner had prostrate France been helped to stand on her feet, than, instead of acting as a free entity respecting the freedom of others, she started acting as a bully and slave-owner. De Gaulle's jingoistic references to the French Empire and the landing of fresh troops in Syria are proof positive that after losing and then regaining her own freedom, France has not yet learnt to respect the freedom of others.

Did I say 'France'? But there are two Frances, aren't there? France the Progressive and France the Reactionary? The painful fact, however, is that so far as the French Empire is concerned, Progressive France has quietly acquiesced in the jingoistic doings of Reactionary France. The record of the French Socialists is as black in this respect as that of the British Labour Party. Even the Communists who used to hold very precise and progressive views on the subject have begun to equivocate and hedge, perhaps to keep the internal unity of France intact. At least, their anti-imperialism is not as pronounced and as it once used to be, as one would like it to be again.

Internally, we see a leftward swing in France. That is a welcome and healthy sign. The resistance movement has definitely caused an upsurge of the people. And yet the

Leftists of France have got to realize, even as the Labourites of Britain have to do, that Imperialism is an evil and corrupting influence, both for those that are governed and for those who govern. So long as the French Empire endures, the French Republic will only be in name.

A dozen miles from Paris I saw in 1938 a big cantonment full of North African troops. I was naturally surprised to find them there and asked a French friend for the reason of their presence. 'They are here to prevent a social revolution.'

Physically those colonial soldiers can be removed from the vicinity of Paris. But, wherever they are—even if they are sent back to North Africa—the continuance of the Empire will always remain an obstacle in the way of a social revolution and the realization of real democracy in France. One cannot enslave another without corrupting and enslaving one's own soul.....

*O Liberty! Can man resign thee!
Once having felt thy gen'rous flame?
Can dungeons, bolts, and bars confine thee,
Or whips thy noble spirit tame?
Too long the world has wept, bewailing
That falsehood's dagger tyrants wield—
But freedom is our sword and shield,
And all their arts are unavailing.*

Well may the Syrians teach the French the meaning of their own national song!

THIS IS SIMLA

—July 1

Simla is not India. But the immediate political destiny of India is being decided in this Himalayan hill-station.

Don't expect a prediction—optimistic or gloomy—from me. After the dismal failure of the Gandhi-Jinnah negotiations, the success of which was so enthusiastically forecast

in these columns, I would not dare to play this dangerous game again.

Writing on Tuesday (June, 26) afternoon, in the Burj House, where most of the press correspondents are staying, one finds oneself choking in an atmosphere thick with rumours. All sorts and kinds of rumours. Gandhiji is meeting Mr Jinnah! Gandhiji is not meeting Mr Jinnah! Mr Jinnah wants League-Congress parity! Mr Jinnah wants Caste-Hindu-Muslim parity, with the right to nominate all the Muslims! The Congress is insisting on three (or two or one) Nationalist Muslims for the five Muslim seats! The Congress and League leaders are going to prepare a joint list and face Wavell with that tomorrow morning! They are not going to do that!

Khizr Hayat is trying to flirt with the Congress! Khizr Hayat is trying to flirt with the League! Did Khizr send an emissary to Maulana Azad last night? Did Khizr contact Jinnah last night? The situation is hopeless—Jinnah won't agree to this, and Azad won't agree to that! The situation is hopeful—a formula has been arrived at through the mediation of a Nationalist Muslim! What's his name? Hush.....I will tell you in confidenceand so it goes on from early morning to midnight, when the temporary telegraph office in the Press Hostel is closed.

So, let me not indulge in any rumour-mongering. Let me rather give you the setting of this historic (?) conference, which may be the prelude to the dawn of a new era in Indian politics, or just another demonstration of our national humiliation.

The setting is Simla. How shall one describe this quaint little town? It is the traditional 'Summer Capital' of British-ruled India. It is a pretty hill station perched amidst the pines at a height of 7,000 feet. It is inhabited by clerks (of all grades—from Rs. 60 to Rs. 6666 p.m.), coolies (who draw the rickshaws), the Buria Sahibs and the Burra Mem Sahibs. It is bounded on the west by the Viceregal Lodge, on the east by the Punjab Governor's residence, on the north by 'Girja Maidan', on the south by the Lower Bazar.

It is all this and more. It is the last outpost of the British Empire. It is the place where Burra Sahibs still dress for dinner, before having their burra pegs, where the White Sahibs and the Brown Sahibs still go about 'dropping their cards' in NOT AT HOME boxes attached to cottage doors, where real milk and real cream are served for tea and coffee, where there is no dearth of pastry or cakes, where eight-course dinners are still served, where a man is only a man and not a Sahib unless he is at least a Deputy Additional Joint Secretary where you can meet everybody who is anybody—or even if he isn't—at Scandal Point after 7 p.m.

Simla is the place where it is cheaper to hire a rickshaw with four coolies to pull it rather than one horse; where only an 'Excellency' may drive up the Mall in a car; where spitting on the road is punishable by a fine of 50 rupees; where lovely peaches and apricots grow in the orchards, but the shops sell tinned fruit imported from Australia; where no local paper is published and Delhi and Lahore papers arrive two days late, the only source of news being the Radio, where *nouveau riche* bourgeoisie women from the Punjab can be seen in droves, parading their gaudy clothes, costly jewels and over-painted faces on the Mall; where Government servants come up for promotions, unemployed youths for clerical jobs, businessmen for war contracts, and political leaders for parleys with the Viceroy....

* * *

This visit to Simla has introduced most of us for the first time to the power that we are up against in our fight for freedom—the bungling but clinging Bureaucracy, the Red Tape, the snobbery and arrogance of the Burra Sahibs, their hypocrisy and false values of social behaviour, their patronizing smiles and contemptuous frowns, their condescending tones which are as annoying as their awful Hindustani accent. In Simla you don't feel there is a war on, you don't feel there has been a horrible famine in large parts of India, you don't feel the quickened pulse of the people, you don't feel the anger and bitterness of frustrated millions, you don't feel the world moving forward to newer, more glorious horizons.

'Simla stands still—like the pine-covered rocks! Simla neither feels nor thinks. Simla seldom reads anything more solid than a detective novel from the lending library on the Mall. But Simla eats—and how! Simla drinks—and how! Simla goes to the pictures twice a week. Simla plays Rummy on Saturday afternoons and Bridge on Sunday mornings. Simla is primarily interested in appointments, transfers, promotions. Simla has neither the old-world beauty of Delhi, nor the dynamic tempo of Bombay, neither the hallowed traditions of Benares nor the carefree gaiety of Mussoorie.

Simla is not a part of India; it is a phantom town that belongs nowhere in the present-day world, it has been left behind by the past (that unfortunately is still with us!)—the past of the blustering Burra Sahibs, the spineless Babus, the cringing coolies! Simla is Clive and Hastings and Dufferin and Hardinge and Willingdon and Churchill and Amery all rolled into one!

One day Simla will change—even as the political destiny of India will change. Already there are 'ominous' signs. Tri-colour flags on the Mall! Rickshaw coolies talking of organizing themselves in a trade union!! Begad Sir.....!!!

But till then, Simla is the last outpost of the British Empire—the very LAST, one hopes.

And it seems but proper that the conference of Indian leaders should be held here. It is like a battle in the heart of 'enemy' territory. Such battles, won or lost, are decisive either way. Will Simla rout the forces that today threaten its existence? Will Simla spread confusion and disruption in the forces of freedom? Will Simla succeed in clouding our vision by its creeping mists, damping our patriotic ardour by its torrential rains? Or will Simla go the way of all the ancient seats of might without right, like Pompeii and Rome and Babylon—and Berlin?

Only when Simla dies as a centre of exploitation, seat of Empire, will it be reborn as a place of sylvan beauty and health-giving climate, a pleasant sight for sore eyes and a tonic for jaded nerves, that nature intended it to be.

TWO MEN—AND A CROWD !

—July 1

Two men appeared at an open window, affectionately clasped to each other, and a crowd of thousands roared with delight.

Two men and a crowd !

The two men, both handsome but no longer young, provided a study in contrasts. They were of nearly the same age, but while one had dignity, the other had charm ; one had the shy, retiring disposition of the scholar, the other had the self-assured stance of the popular leader used to such demonstrations ; one had a little white beard at the tip of his chin and the other had smooth-shaven cheeks.

These two represented two distinct streams of culture. One had been born in holy Mecca, the son of a family of *Ulema*, and graduated (at the age of 13¹) from the great Muslim seminary of Al Azhar ; the other had been born in holy Prayag, near the sacred confluence of the Jumna and the Ganges, the son of a family of Pandits, but had received his education at Harrow and Cambridge. One had delved deep into Oriental philosophy and religion, the other had drunk at the fountain of western scientific knowledge. One had become a divine, an interpreter of the Holy Qoran, the other had drifted towards agnosticism and Marxism. One liked to bury himself in books, the other wanted to climb mountains.

And yet these two streams had come together in the vast whirlpool of the movement for national freedom. Both had contributed to the success of the common cause—one had brought wisdom, the other passion ; one had brought old-world courtesy, the other new-world defiance.

Both of them had influenced the national movement—and each other ! Both had risen to the top, and earned not only the affection and respect of their colleagues and co-workers, but also the adoration of millions of their countrymen.

Maulana Azad Zindabad !

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Zindabad !

Maulana Azad aur Pandit Jawaharlal Zindabad !

The crowd cheered and roared and cheered again. This crowd of Punjabis and Madrasis and Bengalis, *Paharis* of men and women and children officers and clerks and coolies and *chaprasis*! Many of them had walked ten miles to have a glimpse of these two men at the window. They had climbed up hill and down dale, they had dodged policemen and slid down the slope, and sneaked through wire fencings. They had dared the rain and the fog, they had defied the bureaucratic and imperialistic traditions of Simla, jammed the grassy courtyard of Armsdell and lifted their voices above the woolly clouds that hovered overhead. For thirty minutes they had patiently listened to Nehru, who addressed them perched, characteristically on an unprotected balcony. And now they wanted to see Azad, to hear *his* voice. When they saw both of them appear together at the window, the crowd went delirious with joy.

And one wondered if they instinctively saw the symbolic significance of the occasion—that these two men, Azad and Nehru the Muslim and the Hindu, the divine and the agnostic, the scholar and the scientist, were the symbols of an India, with all her many diversities, united in a common purpose. Not mere symbols. They *were* India—*these two men and the crowd*!

THE END OF THE OLD-SCHOOL-TIE

—July 29

'Begad, Sir. Lord Beaverbrook was right. These damned Bolshies are upon top again! Look out for the Gestapo now.'

In Clubs, Turkish Baths, paddocks, in ancestral castles and country houses, wherever the Blimps—the Lords and Ladies of Britain—foregather, this cry must be going up in haughty accents of a doomed aristocracy.

The exit of the Conservatives from office is not merely the replacing of one political party by another. It is the death-knell of feudalism and hereditary privilege, the decisive end of a long chapter in British history, the beginning of a new epoch of social and economic change

As the news comes over the air across the seas in five-minutely bulletins from the B. B. C., it is like the quick-changing score-board in Britain's most historic cricket match. Those who were tipped off for centuries are getting clean bowled. And lads from the village green, armed with crude bats are hitting out, lustily scoring boundary after boundary. Even Churchillian body-line bowling has failed to dislodge them. 'Begad, Sir, it's not cricket!'

The friends of Hitler and Mussolini, those who said, 'Give Hitler a chance', those who betrayed Abyssinia and killed the Spanish Republic, those who slandered the Soviet Union,

The architects of the shameful Munich surrender, those who brought this war on,

The authors of the Zinoviev letter forgery,

The capitalists and company directors, the owners of coal-mines, exploiters of Labour,

The partners in munition factories, the 'merchants of death',

The Old-School-Tie-wallahs.

The Masters of Foxhounds,

The huntin', shootin' brigade,

The younger sons, the cousins and 'in-laws' of the aristocracy,

The Empire-builders, the authors of *The Naked Fakir* slander, those who wanted to 'crush Gandhi',

They are out—out of Office, and, in most cases, even out of the House of Commons!

To us, Indians, nothing has given greater pleasure than to see Leopold Stennet Amery trounced. More than any one

else, this man had come to symbolize to us the blind, callous imperialism of Britain that has been saddled on our backs for over a century and a half now. Nobody who succeeds him can possibly be worse. At least now we shall be spared the humiliation of listening to his sickeningly complacent remarks about India, his blind refutation of the fact of a famine when thousands were dying on the roads and pavements of Calcutta, his libellous accusations against imprisoned national leaders.

Negatively viewed, we cannot but be gratified also at the defeat of Sir James Grigg, War Minister, and Sir George Schuster, both of whom were not so long ago associated with the oppressive imperialist regime in India.

(19) A significant fact that seems to have escaped general attention is that an obscure shoe-maker, without the backing of any party or newspaper, standing for election at the last moment, not only made Churchill's unopposed election impossible, but actually managed to snatch 27 per cent votes from the mighty and formidable Winston, who, if he has any sensitivity, ought to regard this as a vote of censure and a moral defeat.

Having burnt their fingers once during the MacDonald regime, Indians are not likely to be over-enthusiastic about a Labour victory in Britain. But the circumstances *are* different today—never before was Labour returned with such a clear and decisive majority! And no one who has studied and analysed the record of the British Conservatives, both at home and in international affairs, can but be profoundly gratified at the turn of events. 'Unemployment at home appeasement of Nazis and anti-Bolshevism abroad' fairly sums up the traditional Tory policy. Even Churchill, only a few weeks after the end of the war in Europe, was found manoeuvring Britain and the world into an anti-Soviet position—and leading them into a third World War, this time against Russia! With Labour in power, the chances of world peace are infinitely brighter. It will be in an ideal position to form a democratic coalition for peace with France (steadily going towards the Left), the Soviet Union and the resurgent people's forces in the countries of central and

eastern Europe. It may be expected to give a fair deal to the Greeks, thwart the reactionary monarchist plots in half a dozen countries and take a firm stand against Franco's Fascist regime in Spain. Internally, of course, the common people of Britain may now look forward to the introduction of a series of urgent Social Security measures if not an immediate socialist millennium. The stranglehold of reactionary Big Business on the House of Commons (through 181 Conservative M.P.s who held 775 company directorships in capitalist enterprises!) is at last removed.

Even from the Indian view-point, these developments cannot but be welcome. A Listowel or a Cripps is any day preferable to Amery. And Attlee, however uninspiring and weak he might be, represents ideas and forces infinitely preferable to the jingo conservatism of Churchill. British Labour leaders might be wedded to Empire—as many of them, indeed, are! But their victory is the result of the release of certain social forces which, in its turn, will cause the release of other similar social forces (not only in Britain) that are conducive to the development of peace, progress and democracy in the world—including India!

MERRILY WE GO TO HELL !

—August 19

A Fool stands by the side of the road and watches the approach of a body of armed troops.

'Where do these men come from ?' he asks.

'From Peace.'

'Where are they going ?'

'To War.'

'What do they do in the War ?'

'They kill the enemy and burn their cities.'

'Why do they do that ?'

'To make Peace.'

'I cannot understand,' says the Fool. 'To come from Peace and to go into War, in order to make Peace! Why don't they stay at Peace in the first place?'

—AN OLD GERMAN LEGEND

* * *

Weapons made of sharpened stones.

Spears and arrows and swords.

Arrows dipped in poison.

Flame-throwing catapults.

Muzzle-loading guns and cannon.

Rifles and revolvers.

Bombs and hand-grenades.

Battleships and submarines.

The bombing aeroplane.

The Flying Fortress.

The Robot bomb.

THE ATOMIC BOMB!

? ? ? ? ? ? ? ?

This is the graph of human progress—from weapons to kill one, to weapons to kill dozens, to weapons to kill—millions!

If someone kills two of your tribe, then you kill ten of his tribe, so he kills a hundred of your tribe, and you retaliate by killing a thousand of his tribe...and so it goes on! If your enemy invents a rifle, you invent a bomb, then he invents a submarine, so you invent a bomber; he sends a robot bomb and you retaliate with an atomic bomb . . . and so it goes on! And WILL go on unless something is done to break this vicious circle of violence begetting greater violence, which is steadily narrowing down to an inevitable doom.

The Allies started with the object of crushing Nazism, its barbaric system, its callous and inhuman methods of mass slaughter of non-combatants. They have ended (as Gandhiji once predicted) by beating the Nazis and Fascis at their own game of senseless destruction.

All the grimmest and most fantastic forecasts of Marie Corelli, Jules Verne, H. G. Wells and other authors of scientific fantasies have been reduced to children's nursery rhymes and fairy tales by the super-grim reality of the Atomic

Bomb. Astonishing! Amazing! Sensational! World-shattering! Epoch-making! Greatest achievement of human genius! Most frightful engine of destruction ever invented in the history of man!.....No adjective, no superlative, can convey the magnitude of the power that man has suddenly acquired, or foretell the uses to which that power will be put. The *genie* has come out of the bottle, enveloped in a cloud of smoke rising seven miles high. And who dare predict what the monster will do, or how it can be tamed? Or can it be tamed?

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Out of evil cometh good! And out of the atom bomb may emerge atom-run factories, atomic power-driven railways, and ships, atomic cures for cancer and other incurable diseases—in short, a clean, healthy happy life for the millions, without drudgery and exploitation?

But will it happen? History is not very optimistic.

Paper was invented by the wise Chinese to write poetry on—not to print lies and libels, not to publish vulgar books and reactionary newspapers, not to corrupt the minds of people!

Dynamite was invented by Alfred Nobel to be used for breaking through rocks and mountains—not to blow human beings to bits!

The aeroplane was invented for faster travel, to make the world one, not to shower death and destruction on defenceless populations.

All these beneficial devices—and many more—were constituted to serve the evil ends of imperialists and capitalists who held power and used science to maintain and increase that power.

What guarantee is there that the atomic bomb, which certainly has not been invented for any peaceful purpose, will ultimately be used by the powers not for destruction but for the welfare of mankind?

The record of capitalists who control armament and chemical firms all over the world has been an evil one. These merchants of death have been carrying on a bloody traffic, squeezing fat dividends out of the dead bodies of millions of

soldiers killed in the wars which, even if they have not engineered them, they have certainly encouraged. The Imperialists have used every single scientific invention—be it wireless or bombing 'planes—to perpetuate their stranglehold on the world. What guarantee is there that these two classes will not use the atomic bomb for purposes of aggrandizement, aggression and exploitation?

Already one notices a number of evil straws blowing in the wind. Here are a few.

1. The atomic bomb was not used against Germany, a European aggressor nation, but only against JAPAN, an Asiatic aggressor nation.

2. Russia, one of the 'Big Three', was not taken into confidence with regard to the secrets of the atomic bomb. Nor was China. The *Sunday Observer* of London has already posed the question. 'Will the exclusive knowledge of the secrets of atomic bomb production be employed as a lever to make the Soviet Union accept the Anglo-American viewpoint on certain controversial European and Near-Eastern issues?'

3. The super-capitalist firm of Dupont (one of the reactionary, anti-New Deal enterprises) has been closely connected with the production of the atomic bomb. This is the firm to which Fenner Brockway referred in his book, *Bloody Traffic*, as 'the most important chemical concern responsible for poison gas manufacture in America.' Through international financial arrangements it was connected both with Imperial Chemical of Britain and I. G. Farbenindustrie of Germany, 'the father and founder of poison gas warfare'!

4. Within a few hours of the atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima, shares in a leading Uranium company advanced as much as 90 points in trading on the Stock Exchange. Death pays a Dividend—and HOW!

The atomic bomb is here. There is no use blinding one's eyes to this reality, however grim and horrible it might be.

Here is the greatest weapon in the hands of man, the biggest potential source of energy. The question is: 'Who is going to wield it? And for what purpose?'

The masters of the atomic bomb have become virtual masters of the world. All old notions of security are gone. From now on neither guards, nor garrisons, nor infantry, nor tanks, nor guns, are going to guarantee a country's security. The old frontiers, mountains, rivers, canals strategic routes like the Suez and the Dardanelles—they have all lost their importance. Even human valour, patriotism, heroism—how will they avail against a 400-pounder atomic bomb? Equally futile is a dictator's jingoism—unless backed by atomic energy.

The atomic bomb can mean the end of aggressors, as also the birth of super-aggressors. It can usher in Peace and Prosperity. It can also make life itself extinct on this planet.

H. G. Wells has summed it up: 'This thing can wipe out everything bad—or good—in the world. It is up to the people to decide which.'

WHAT DO THE PEOPLE DECIDE?

THE KINK Then where is the hope this trade in death will die?

FRITHIOF. There IS none—while this social order lives.

*The man of business is the God of War,
And gold pulls all the strings and—all the triggers.*

—ISRAEL ZANGWILL.

THOSE WHO RULE BY THE SWORD...

—August 26

So, Militarist Japan has gone the way of Mussolini's Fascist Italy and Hitler's Nazi Germany. The arrogance of the Sons of Heaven has been laid into the dust. The massacres of Nanking, the bombing of Chinese cities, the bayoneting of Chinese children, the raping of Chinese women.

have been avenged. Those who, like Imperialist Japan, rule by the Sword, shall perish by the Sword!

The Atomic Bomb is a frightful weapon to use against anyone—Japanese or Germans, Americans, British or Indians. Its use by the Americans was regrettable in the larger interests of humanity. But let no sympathy be wasted on the rulers and militarists of Japan who would not have had any scruples whatever to use the same weapon, not twice, but a hundred times—if *only they possessed it!* The Japanese people, as distinguished from their jingoistic rulers, are deserving of sympathy, like all slaves of similar dictatorships—but the millions of Japanese soldiers cannot escape the guilt of all the senseless violence and barbarities that they perpetrated on defenceless China. Lying, treachery, indiscriminate bombing, massacres, rape and arson, emasculation of a whole people by deliberate fostering of the drug habits—there is no crime that Japan has not committed during the last eight years in China.

If today Japanese cities lie devastated by the Atomic Bomb if Japan has to suffer the humiliation of unconditional surrender, if once-flourishing Japanese industries are ruined, if the Japanese people are made to pay crushing reparations, if their God-Emperor is insulted and listed among war criminals, the Japanese have only themselves to blame.

They were the first to start the vicious circle of violence and aggression. The wheel of *Karma*—or, if you like, the inevitable cycle of thesis and anti-thesis—has turned full circle and today Japan has been smitten by Nemesis. Japan sowed the wind, now let it reap the whirlwind.

I write in this vein because I know that, blinded by their hatred and distrust of British imperialism, some Indians have nursed a sneaking sympathy—even admiration—for the Fascists and the Nazis. In the case of Japan, this sympathy was stronger—for wasn't Japan an Asiatic Power challenging the supremacy of the West? Gandhiji, Azad, Nehru, Tagore, have all, on different occasions exposed the true hideous face of Japan behind the hypocritical mask of 'Asia For Asiatics'. But, since the Atom Bomb raid on Japanese cities and the

subsequent Japanese surrender. this misguided sympathy has flared up again and I find that even otherwise sober and patriotic newspapers are writing about Japan as if it were an innocent victim of aggression and not the original aggressor, now tasting a dose of its own medicine. I cannot understand how these Asiatic patriots can forget that the Chinese, too, are Asiatics.

This, to my mind, is a serious matter. For in this unthinking (is it 'unthinking' in all cases?) sympathy for Japan lie the seeds of Fascism—yes, an Indian brand of Fascism! Happily the Indian National Congress, thanks to the humanitarianism of Gandhiji and the international Socialism of Nehru, has been, and is, anti-Fascist. But, some political parties in the country—or important sections of them—are not only not anti-Fascist, but have definite pro-Fascist leanings. We must not forget that racial fanaticism, religious intolerance, jingoism, worship of the Sword, the One-Leader principle—all these are the raw materials of Fascism.

Fascism did not die with Hitler or Mussolini. Nor can it be blasted by the atomic bomb! It has to be met and challenged in the minds and hearts of men. Its allies are arrogance and unreason; it can only be exterminated by the spread of rationalism and the true ideals of political and economic democracy.

THE PARADOX OF BOSE

—September 2

The news of the death of Subhas Chandra Bose rings the curtain down on a life full of dramatic—even melodramatic—highlights. An odd mixture of heroism and tragedy, of selfless patriotic sacrifice and political opportunism, of an acute and brilliant mind and an incapacity to rise above bitterness and frustration, Bose has remained an enigma in death as he was an enigma in life. Even the circumstances of his death are shrouded in mystery—once before

he was reported killed, and the news was later contradicted. Many believe that he is still alive.

And, ironically enough, those Congress Right-Wingers who hounded him out of the Congress in 1938 'for his grave act of indiscipline', declaring him 'disqualified as President of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee and to be member of any elective Congress Committee', are today loudest in their praises of him, while those—the Communists—who welcomed and supported his Forward Bloc, and collaborated with him through the 'Left Consolidation Committee', are denouncing him as a traitor, a Fifth Columnist and a stooge of the Fascists.

In the opinion of this writer, it is both dangerous and unfair to over-simplify the motives and conduct of so complex a character—especially when his complexity was but a reflection of the psychological and political complexities and contradictions in our national life. And this applies to his posthumous adulators as well as his bitter denouncers. If Bose had leanings towards Fascism, he did not develop them suddenly in 1941 when he secretly escaped from India; he had given expression to them in cold print in his book—at least two years before the Communists invited all genuine Leftists and Marxists to 'extend the hand of co-operation' to him and his Bloc. And if Bose's dynamism and adventurous spirit, his uncompromising hostility against Imperialism, his impatience with 'drift towards constitutionalism' and his revolutionary impulses, are worthy of commendation, then was it not for those very traits of his that disciplinary action was taken against him in 1938?

In fairness to him who is dead and to them who are alive, let us be objective for once in evaluating Bose's political record. He (if he is dead) is beyond both praise and censure. But we are not—and there is every danger that lack of balance on our part will only strengthen either one set of reactionaries or another, and confuse and injure the cause of freedom for which, according to his lights, he lived, worked—and died.

That Bose was a brave man, that he loved his country, that he strove selflessly for its freedom, that he sacrificed

money, position, health, for its sake—these facts none dare deny! To him (along with Jawaharlal Nehru) went the credit of infusing a youthful and dynamic spirit in our national movement.

And yet he was the product of a certain class, a certain psychological environment, a certain age and era of politics. From childhood he was influenced by religion and acquired a mystical strain which, coupled with bitterness, often leads one in the direction of Fascism. With a strong will and a personality demanding expression, he seems to have had also a flair for the dramatic, the spectacular, the adventurous action. He ran away from school to wander as a monk in the Himalayas. Later, he threw away a Civil Service job to join the national movement. At the Calcutta session of the Congress he organized the volunteers and went about in the G.O.C.'s uniform, on the back of a white charger. Through the Naujawan Bharat Sabha and the Independence of India League he mobilized the youth of the country to give Congress a leftward push. He had none of the Gandhian inhibitions about violence, nor Nehru's faith in international Socialism. He quarrelled with both. He led a revolt against the Gandhi-ites. He formed a *Forward Bloc* and rallied the Socialists and Communists, but soon he was led by the very force of circumstances into an unholy alliance with reactionary anti-Congress, anti-Gandhi elements, including Communalists and capitalists. All this added up to—extreme Left Nationalism of the De Valera type, with a sneaking, uninformed admiration for the 'enemies of my enemy'—the Fascists and the Nazis. Nor was he alone in this attitude. A section of nationalist opinion in the country thought along the same opportunist lines, though Gandhi and Nehru kept the wagon of the Congress firmly hitched to the star of international idealism.

But in the final analysis it was the constant imperialist repression that threw Bose into the arms of the Fascists—both ideologically and literally. Where else was he to take refuge, once he had decided on the desperate (but traditionally revolutionary) step of escaping from the vast prison-house that was India? It was against the principles of Gandhian

Satyagraha, but it was a spectacular and courageous act that could not but appeal to the imagination of people in general. But when he was reported to have reached Axis territory, there was hardly any adulation of his action in responsible Congress circles. His flight and subsequent affiliation with the Fascist Powers were seen as the acts of a desperate defeatist who was unbalanced and misguided; his hopes of securing India's freedom with Axis aid were not taken seriously by anyone except his personal followers and some extremists. Gandhiji dissociated himself from Bose's policy. Nehru declared he would fight him if he invaded India with the help of a Japanese army. Bose's actions were widely regretted by Congressmen.

But it was a tragedy, not a crime drama involving a villain. He was the symbol of frustration, not of the Fifth Column. By taking asylum in Axis territory, Bose highlighted the tragic contradiction of the world, caught between the equally evil forces of imperialism and Fascism, and a patriot being forced to accept the latter to escape the former! Bose was not guilty of murder. His was a case of suicide. He did not stab India in the back, he wounded his own integrity as a patriot. And it is IMPERIALISM that was the villain of the piece, that drove honest patriots into the arms of Fascism! Not Bose but Imperialism deserves censure.

But if he did not deserve censure, he did not deserve any praise, either, for the course he adopted after his flight from India. He ought never to have allowed his anti-imperialist bitterness to blind him to the horrible, evil reality of Fascism...

Indians (with few exceptions) have mourned the death of Bose. Tributes have been paid to his memory from all quarters. Among the people—the common people thirsting for freedom—he is remembered with affection. But it is the memory of Bose the fighter of freedom that is being honoured—not of Bose the friend of Fascism! It is the dominant impulse of his life, his passion for freedom, that is being eulogized, not his mistakes. I have no doubt about it. The phenomenal country-wide outburst of enthusiasm is not a sign of our drift towards Fascism, but of our abiding faith in Freedom. And yet let Bose's life be both a source of

inspiration and a warning to us : A patriot and a hero can fulfil his destiny only by tempering his passion for freedom with integrity and idealism, not by blind bitterness but by open-eyed understanding of conflicting world forces.

It is necessary to reiterate this, for there is a danger of the Bose Legend being exploited by the enemies of Freedom—the potential Fascists who might try to replace the tyranny of imperialism with a tyranny of their own. That would be a crime, indeed ! For it would be a misuse of his name and his deeds for the negation of his fundamental motives.

ARGUMENT BY BLOOD

—*September 16*

Who was it that said to his bitter political opponent: Sir, I disagree with everything you say, but I will give my life to defend your right to say it?

This, indeed, is the essence of democracy. And this has been the keynote of inter-party relations within the Indian freedom movement. Staunch believers in non-violence have pleaded for the lives of terrorists, and it was orthodox Congressmen who financed and conducted the defence of the Communists in the Meerut Conspiracy Case. On the other hand, Communists have been known to have agitated for release of the Congress leaders and the legalization of the Congress. And, even if Mr Jinnah did not care to utter a word of protest against Government's arbitrary action against the Congress in 1942, I am sure Gandhiji would be the first to condemn the Government if the Viceroy took it into his head to put a ban on the activities of the Muslim League. When some fanatical followers of the Kashmir Muslim Conference threw stones at Maulana Azad's procession in Srinagar, at least a few Muslim Leaguers of the Punjab had the decency to condemn the importation of such violent tactics into political controversy.

In this respect the traditions of political life in our country are unique and markedly in contrast with other countries where lying, slander, brickbats and truncheons, even guns, are regularly used in settling party differences. This has been possible because we are a people who are struggling for our freedom, and that being our common goal, we have recognized the inevitability of different patriots trying different 'roads to freedom'. The ways of a terrorist may be anathema to a follower of Ahimsa, but the same fire of patriotism burns in both hearts. A Communist may talk the jargon of Marxism and dialectical materialism, a Congress Socialist may speak in terms of the 'atomic revolution', a Gandhi-ite might seek inspiration from the 'inner voice'—but aren't they all passionately trying to reach the same destination—a Free India?

And thus, by the use of wise tolerance and a sense of humour in dealing with fellow-patriots of opposite political views, we have hitherto saved the country from much fratricidal warfare and bloodshed. In political controversy we have torn each other to bits, but only figuratively—never literally. We have had communal riots, of course, but no political hooliganism—till the recent attack on individual Communists, in Bombay!

This 'Argument by Blood' is a crimson danger signal. It is to be deplored not only on grounds of humanitarianism—who, after all, can defend such vicious violence?—but also on grounds of political expediency as well as political morality. To import such methods into political warfare is to play with fire. If brickbats and sticks become an accepted means of settling political controversy, rivers of blood will flow over the country and a vicious atmosphere created which will help only one party—IMPERIALISM—which has thrived so far by exploiting our communal differences and may now get a new lease of life by exploiting the Congress-Communist feud. Are we going to re-solder with our own hands the fetters that are being broken and are about to fall from our feet—after decades of struggle and sacrifice?

It takes two to make a quarrel—political or personal. And, while unreservedly condemning the hooliganism

practised recently against the Communists (thank heavens, the attacks have ceased now !) I cannot help telling my Communist friends that some of their words and deeds have been tactlessly provocative, liable to be misunderstood and to cause bitterness. Their attacks on Subhas, the Forward Bloc and the Indian National Army, for instance, have neither been in good taste, nor have they taken into account the prevailing sensitivity and temper of the people. And when I say 'the people', I mean the PEOPLE—the vast patriotic millions of this country and NOT a few capitalists who are anxious to kill Communism before it menaces their profits, or a handful of Leftist factionists who dispute with Stalin the *gaddi* of Marx.

The opposition to the Communists is drawn from two main sources—the Capitalist who is opposed to Communism and naturally wants to smash it, and the Patriot who has nothing against Communism as such, but who (rightly or wrongly) is bitter about the last three years' *policy* of the Communist Party of India. (I suspect the former is trying to exploit the latter.) The Communists, if they are sincere about Communism, must expose the Capitalist and conciliate the Patriot.

' THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN ME '

—October 7

Once again the evil shadow of a riot fell over the Bombay landscape. Once again the *goonda* and the hooligan, the man-with-the-knife, the cowardly nocturnal bandit, held a population of two millions in an abject state of helplessness. Once again the peaceful citizen went about in constant fear of his life. It is a disgrace to the city and to us who dwell in it.

Eleven years have I passed in Bombay and loved this city of my adoption as much as—if not more than—the town of my birth. I like everything about Bombay, its ‘single *cha*’ and ‘soda-lemon mix’, its cosmopolitan crowds, its glorious sea-face, its pretty suburbs, and even the over-crowded suburban trains. I am attuned to the fast tempo of Bombay life, and by comparison find life in any other city—even Calcutta, if my Bengali friends will forgive me!—too dull, provincial and pedestrian for my taste. I am ready to defend even some of its shortcomings and unseemly characteristics—its lack of a distinct cultural stamp, its somewhat materialist outlook on life, its hustle and bustle. But if, with all my love of Bombay, there is one thing I am unable to condone it is the ever-frequent recrudescence of rioting and hooliganism in the city. In eleven years I have personally seen it erupt almost half a dozen times.

This rioting is a horrible affair—cowardly, brutal, slimy and surreptitious, like a serpent’s ways. It has not even the courage and sense of adventure of deadly human warfare, much less the jungle glory of wild animals going at one another with tooth and fang and claw. It is the worst kind of gangsterism without the Chicago gunman’s thrilling dare-devilry.

I have seen from my balcony, an innocent pedestrian being stabbed by a *goonda* on the Byculla Bridge. It was many years ago, but the gory memory still haunts my dreams and turns them into nightmares. I have experienced the sense of shame and helplessness at being unable to do anything about it. I have walked through half-darkened streets, with my heart going pit-a-pat, expecting an assassin’s knife at every turn. Once or twice, I remember, I was actually followed by suspicious-looking toughs whose expression boded no solicitude for my health or life. Somehow I managed to reach home safely, but I knew what it was to taste danger and experience the fear of imminent death. Somehow I am still alive, but, through the years, hundreds have not been so lucky. *Via* the morgue and the mortuary, they have gone to wherever the victims of riots go after their death. I never hear of a riot casualty without feeling, ‘That, but for the

grace of circumstance, might have been me.' All of us die every time any one dies, for each is involved in all and all in each, and it is even truer of such unprovoked, blind killings that the tragedy of one might be the tragedy of one million.

These riots are generally—one suspects, not without purpose—called 'Communal' riots. They are supposed to be an inevitable manifestation of the deep-rooted hatred that exists between Hindus and Muslims. Begad, Sir, Beverley Nichols was right after all, they are thirsty for each other's blood look at these riot casualty figures!

Are these communal riots? Are they an expression of fanaticism and irreconcilable rivalry between Hindus and Muslims? Or what are they?

There is no doubt that a religious or pseudo-religious issue is sometimes used as a pretext and made out to be the provocation for such outburst of cowardly violence. But that no more makes them 'communal' than gang warfare in New York can be called political inter-party warfare though undoubtedly some gangsters do vote on the Republican and others on the Democratic ticket.

A riot is an expression not of communal bitterness but (quite obviously) of hooliganism. How is Hinduism or Islam affected (for better or worse) by a *mowali* sneaking up from behind and stabbing a poor *doodh-wallah* or baker who happens to be up and about at an early hour of the morning? If a riot is a 'Hindu-Muslim' affair, why don't all the Hindus and Muslims fight it out? If it is an expression of fanaticism, why are not fanatics in the forefront of the killers and other fanatics among the victims?

Who is the man who does the stabbing in a riot? Not a religion-obsessed fanatic—but a professional *mowali*, a *habitué* of gambling dens, a drunkard, a mercenary killer, a murder maniac. An industrial city, with its slums and vice-dens, with its high-pressure atmosphere of unscrupulous, get-rich-quick money-grabbing, breeds this class, as it breeds pimps and prostitutes, *suttawallahs* and brothel-keepers. Bombay has been particularly plagued by the existence of this parasitical and poisonous class of men who wield knives and knuckle-dusters for a living. They do precious little else—unless it

be boozing and generally throwing their weight about, each keeping the people of his respective locality terrorized. This is no hidden gang; the *dadas* and *mowalis* are well known to the police and to the public. They sometimes extort money at the point of the knife, right under the nose of the police. In certain circles they are known and used as strike-breakers, and their gangs provide the black-legs. As a rule, they are (like all true 'artists'!) above politics. For a price—or even for the mere love of it (*Arts Gratia Artis*)—they are willing to stab a Hindu or a Muslim, a capitalist or a Communist.

To the utter shame of Bombay this class has become a permanent feature of the local landscape. No one—least of all the police—seems to be able to do anything about it, or even to give some thought to doing something about it. Every now and then a few of them are run out of the town, but they or their substitutes, come back by the return train and their activities never stop.

The inter-communal tension no doubt needs to be eased. Passions are being roused and inflamed on each side. Conciliation, tolerance, unity—these are admirable sentiments which certainly need to be inculcated. But I have a feeling that we play the gangsters' game by calling their evil exploits 'communal riots'. I have a feeling that Bombay will be really free from this menace only when the professional killers are smoked out of their dens and brought to book, even as they were run out of New York by (the then) Attorney Dewey.

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OF PRINCES AND POETS

—October 28

There was an amusing interlude when Pandit Nehru in the middle of his speech stopped and said parenthetically: 'Madam Chairman, may I express my surprise at the whole

body of P.E.N. standing up when a princely message was read.' (Cheers).

—A.P.I. report from Jaipur.

It is difficult to see why the correspondent refers to this as an 'amusing' interlude. Nor was there much cause for Pandit Nehru's surprise at a body of writers standing up to hear a princely message being read out. For, after all, weren't these writers assembled there under princely auspices? And hadn't 'Madam Chairman' herself once inscribed an Ode in praise of another Prince and presented it at a Durbar?

Deign, Prince, my tribute to receive,
This lyric offering to your name,
Who round your jewelled sceptre bind
The lilies of a poet's fame

And wasn't this conference of writers and litterateurs inaugurated by Sir Mirza Ismail, the Prime Minister of the same feudal Prince whose message was read out? And were not paid propagandists of the Princely order (like Sardar K.M. Pannikar, Prime Minister of Bikaner, whose authorship is strictly limited to extolling the alleged virtues of reactionary feudalism) among the prominent speakers at the conference?

The Princes, through the ages, have been known for their patronage of the arts and literature. Some of them breed pedigreed horses, others specialize in prize-winning dogs. Some spend the millions squeezed out of their starving peasants on buying Rolls Royce cars, others on polo ponies. Some encourage Terpsichorean talent by maintaining hordes of 'dancing girls', others reveal their taste for music by their interest in songstresses. A few are patrons of the Music and maintain court poets along with court clowns and court dancers! And, when tired of all other diversions, one of them might even condescend to summon a gathering of intellectuals and writers to amuse him. For that has ever been the prerogative of the Princes.

Elizabeth, the Virgin Queen of England, was amused by Shakespeare and Bacon. Mahmud Ghaznavi, the iconoclast, could hire Firdausi to sing the praises of the ancient kings of Iran and then (like some publishers of today) cheat the

poor poet of his royalties! Goethe had a Count to patronize him and Zauq and Ghalib had an Emperor. Going back in history, Vikramaditya had the great Kalidasa among his court decorations, even as Akbar, the Great Mughul, had Tansen among his *Nauratan*. And the Maharaja of Jaipur (how many guns?) when he is not too busy thinking about his polo ponies, can dictate a patronizing message to a gathering of intellectuals, assembled in his capital under his princely auspices! When they got up—these giants of intellect and learning—to pay their homage to the message of a minor Prince (how many guns?) the members of P.E.N. were only carrying on the ancient traditions of the court poets—and the court clowns! One can understand a staunch democrat like Nehru being scandalized by such a spectacle, but he should not have been ‘surprised’ at the modern Kalidasas and Firdausis paying their homage to the Vikramadityas and Mahmuds of today!

I have nothing against P.E.N. It might surprise the columnist who, while writing about P.E.N., has been sneering at ‘self-styled progressives’ that quite a few prominent members of the All-India Progressive Writers’ Association, including the General Secretary and the Joint Secretary are members of P.E.N., too. Indeed, so am I! But I am afraid the Indian P.E.N., if it has to justify itself as a representative organization of Indian writers, will have to change its present character and its present affiliations. It has succumbed to the temptation (all too strong in India) to embellish its roll with glittering names, regardless of whether they come in the category of writers or not. It seems that a man, to be recognized as a writer in India, may have any profession (Law, Politics, Medicine, Teaching)—except that of writing for a living! P.E.N. membership seems to consist largely of these ‘honorary’ writers. And the ‘P’ of the P.E.N. seems to stand not so much for Poets and Playwrights as for Professors—and Prime Ministers! P.E.N., if it is to vindicate itself, must recognize that writing in India has gone beyond intellectual dilettantism—and feudal patronage!

WHAT PRICE CLARITY?

—October 28

Has the Biblical phrase, 'Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God', a greater wealth of meaning than Lenin's 'Religion is the opium of the people'? The answer will depend on whether one is a believer in religion or a Marxist atheist. But judged purely as literature, who shall decide between the Bible and *Das Kapital*, between the Vedas and Bernard Shaw's Prefaces, between the *Bhagawad-Gita* and *Gitanjali*?

No sensible modern-minded person would waste his time in such comparisons. For the quality of writing changes—and must change—with the times, and one's reaction to religious literature is necessarily conditioned by one's faith. What may seem a model of clarity to a devout Vedic scholar of Sanskrit may strike an average reader of today as a jungle of confused writing. And what is the very essence of logic to a devotee of Marx may very well shock a pious Pandit as heretical nonsense. (I once gave the *Bhagawad-Gita* to a Socialist friend and when he read it he was surprised how Gandhiji could admire a book which was manifestly a justification of violence and said not a word in praise of non-violence!)

But, at the P. E. N. Conference Professor Radha Kumud Mookerjee raised this issue in his paper on 'Ancient Indian Literature and the Evolution of New Literary Forms'. The Vedic ideal of literary composition, he said, was that every word must convey the maximum thought and that no word must appear which was merely decorative or superfluous. Characterizing modern literature, as 'wordy, verbose and garrulous', he cited the Bible as a model of clarity—'in which every word is in its position as an inevitable rational necessity'. Now I have heard this statement before. Every Christian naturally believes that his Scripture is not only the last word in moral teaching but also the model for literary composition. Brought up in the tradition of Christian teaching,

many of us in India have also come to believe it. It might even be true. But just at random, only to test Professor Mookerjee's statement, I opened my copy of the New Testament, and this is what I read:

'And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people, (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.

'And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

'And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.'

'Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.'

Now I am not a scoffer at religions and find in them much that is elevating and uplifting. I have a great veneration for Christ, who, like the Buddha and Prophet Mohamed, was a revolutionary in his own age. Doubtless there is much of value in the Bible. But, for the life of me, I cannot understand how the language I have quoted above can be cited as a model of clarity. It might have been clear to the Englishmen of the mediaeval days, but it is not clear to me today. What is meant by the people being 'in Solomon's porch'? What does 'durst' mean? And is a 'shadow' cast or does it 'overshadow' something? What does 'overshadow' mean here, anyway?

I think this illusion of certain of our savants, scholars and professors about the superiority of everything ancient needs to be punctured now and then. In plumbing, as in poetry, the modern world has advanced far, far beyond the olden days. It has to be so. It must be so. For that is the Law of Evolution. Modern thought is deeper, wider; it has plumbed new depths of human psychology and behaviour, its ramifications extend to economics on the one hand and psycho-analysis on the other. The ancients could express themselves in simple terms because Faith is simpler than Reason, and Faith was the corner-stone of what they wrote. Neither dialectical reasoning nor psychological analysis found any place in their writings. The intricacies and subtleties of

human psychology were a closed book to them. Life itself was 'simple', because it was primitive. Class relations as also relations between the sexes were fixed, unquestioned, pre-determined, because they had the sanction of Faith. Doubt was taboo and questioning a heresy. No wonder expression was simple. Today life is fuller, deeper, more complicated. Men are not content to BELIEVE; they are inquisitive, sceptical, they want to probe not only the bowels of the earth but also their own minds and souls. Relations between nations, classes, sexes, are in a state of violent readjustment. Literature today must serve ALL people, not merely princes and priests, as in the past. Writing itself is no longer the monopoly of a privileged few. Millions, kept ignorant and dumb through the centuries, are striving for self-expression. How then can any writer who does not want to escape into the past, and who must mirror the vital conflicts of his age, achieve the ideal of Vedic or Biblical 'clarity' and 'simplicity'?

NOT GUILTY!

—November 4

Tomorrow will begin one of the most sensational trials in the political history of modern India—the trial of the I. N. A. officers who are charged with treason.

The trial, in its impact on the public mind, will rank with the trial of Bhagat Singh and B. K. Dutt, the Meerut conspiracy case and the two Lahore conspiracy cases. The men involved are unknown—a military officer is never a popular figure in India! At the moment of writing I cannot recall the name of a single one of them. Thousands of patriots have suffered much more in the country's cause. Hundreds have defied the might of the Empire in an even more spectacular manner. What then makes these men the centre of such a country-wide interest, the anxiety and affection of millions focussed on them?

What are they like ? I do not know. The young men who usually join the Army as officers seldom inspire any enthusiasm among us. We know the type—sportsmen sons of the aristocracy and the leisured class, hard drinkers, aggressive males, determined to have a good time, generally without any idealism or even a trace of political consciousness.

That out of their ranks have emerged these young men—the prisoners in the Red Fort of Delhi—who have become not only the idols and heroes of the populace, but also become the biggest political issue of the day, is one of the strongest paradoxes of the paradoxical war that has just ended. Who would have imagined a few years ago that Congress leaders, only recently out of jail themselves, would be forming Defence Committees to help Captains and Lieutenants, or that Army officers—traditionally ultra-loyalists—would be facing charges of sedition!

These men and thousands of their other comrades, by the peculiar circumstances in which they find themselves, have become a symbol. A symbol of that defiant spirit of our freedom struggle that found expression, at a critical moment of destiny, in two ringing words : QUIT INDIA.

I do not know whether these officers are pro-Japs or not. I do not know whether they have Fascist sympathies or not. Possibly they have, possibly not. That is not the issue involved, in any case. The important and historical fact is that these men dared defy not only the might of an empire but also the traditions of their own class, that they made (however futile and foolish and ill-advised) a bold and spectacular bid to free their country by armed insurrection. It is this that appeals to the imagination of the people—not hair-splitting legalistic issues, nor the ideological conflict between Fascism and Democracy.

Are they Quislings and Traitors because they depended upon the help of Fascist Japan to free India ?

Was Lenin a Fifth Columnist because he was living as a refugee in Germany, during the last war, and without German help, would not have been able to reach Russia and start the Revolution which changed the history of the whole world ? Was Sun Yat-sen a traitor because he worked for the Chinese revolution from abroad ? A successful revolutionary becomes

a historical figure, an unsuccessful one faces the firing squad. The story of the I. N. A. might not provide a complete parallel to the historical cases of Lenin and Sun Yat-sen, but no one can fail to note the similarity of motives.

The only circumstance that somewhat prejudices the case of these men is their—and their army's—association with the Japanese militarists. The complete story is yet to be told and it might well be a case of an unwilling but inevitable friendship. But if they did fall for the glib phrases of the Fascists (which I doubt in the case of intelligent and educated officers), it could only be because bitterness against imperialism had blinded them to the evil spots of Fascism. 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend' is false logic—but the I.N.A. officers and men are not the only ones who have followed it. When Churchill, the champion Red-hater, came out in support of the Soviet Union when Hitler attacked Russia, his mind was following the same process of reasoning!

If the I.N.A. can be tried for any crime, it cannot be defection from the British army, but for helping the Japanese army. And, under no reasonable system of Law, can the British army authorities sit in judgement over them.

The I. N. A. officers have become symbols of anti-imperialist resistance. And our rulers seem to have realized that. That is why they are so severe in dealing with them. They can understand—and perhaps forgive—those who go over to the other side for the sake of money, but patriotic motives are unforgivable, incomprehensible—and punishable!

The I. N. A. officers may not be let off by the Court-Martial. They will not be. But the Court of Indian Public Opinion has already given the verdict: NOT GUILTY.

PARADOXES OF THE PUNJAB

—November 25

The 'Land of the Five Rivers' is the land of a million enigmas, the most paradoxical province in India!

It was in the Punjab that some of the earliest revolutionaries—the Babar Akalis, the Ghadar Party men—were born.

It was in the Punjab that some of the most zealous supporters of the British—for example, the late Mian Sir Fazli Husain, the late Mian Sir Mohd. Shafi, Malik Feroze Khan Noon, etc—were born.

It was the Punjab that gave birth to dauntless revolutionary heroes like Bhagat Singh.

It is in the Punjab that imprisoned freedom fighters are tortured.

It was in the Punjab that the Jallianwalla Bagh massacre took place—the spark that ignited the great revolt led by Gandhiji in 1920!

It was in the Punjab, on the banks of the Ravi, that the flag of complete independence was first raised by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in 1928.

The Punjab has contributed the largest number of soldiers to the British army in India.

The majority of soldiers and officers who joined the Indian National Army were Punjabis.

I know something about the Punjab. It is the province where the land is fertile and the peasants are virile. The Bengal Famine tragedy could never have occurred in the Punjab. The Punjabi peasants, before dying of starvation, would have raided the hoarders' granaries and looted them.

It is the province where peasants are comparatively prosperous and contended—too contended! Contended and ignorant!!

It is the province of peasant proprietors—or, rather, it *was* until British imperialism *created* a class of rich and powerful landlords by granting large tracts of land to Government's favourites as rewards for their acts of loyalty. (The

grandsons of a soldier who saved a British General's life during the revolt of 1857 own several thousand acres, roll about in luxurious cars and salaam low at Gubernatorial darbars!) These are the men who, because of their power and position, lead both the Unionist and the Muslim League parties in the Punjab.

Most of these are Muslims but they have their Hindu (mostly Jat) and Sikh counterparts, too, who own big tracts of land by the grace of the *Sarkar* and are, therefore, traditionally loyalist.

The pattern of society in the Punjab is still largely feudal. It is not so much your politics but the family and the clan to which you belong that determine your influence.

In Western Punjab the land is not so fertile, and for decades, the sons of peasants have been enlisting in the army—ANY army!—to supplement the meagre incomes of their fathers. Thousands and thousands of families in the Punjab would starve if the monthly money order did not arrive from the front or the cantonment, wherever the *jawaan* might happen to be! Hundreds of these soldiers have been rewarded, not only with medals and sanads, but with the more substantial '*murabbas*' (squares) of reclaimed land and have joined the class of loyalist land-holders. The Subedar Major Sahib, when he retires to settle on Government-granted land, does not talk sedition!

The great division of the Punjab is between the Agriculturists and the Non-Agriculturists. The Agriculturists have the land (it is inalienable), the Non Agriculturists have education and (in the case of Sahukars) MONEY! The money-lender is the most hated institution in rural Punjab. The Sahukars could not acquire land, but they could charge compound interest and thus slowly suck the blood of the indebted peasant—till the Government passed legislation to control usury in order to appease the peasant.

The peasants are mostly (but not all) Muslims, the educated middle-class is mostly Hindu, the money-lenders are *all* Hindu (peculiar that the Pathan money-lender operates in Bombay, but not nearer home in the Punjab!). And thus the stresses of economics, in the Punjab, as elsewhere, are not unoften translated into terms of communalism and fanaticism. The Punjabi Hindu tends to suffer from an inferiority

complex (which breeds revivalism and chauvinism of the Arya Samaj type) while the Muslim suffers from a superiority complex and dreams of a Pakistan in which he can lord it over not only the Hindus but also the Muslim populations of the backward Frontier, Sind and Baluchistan.

The Punjabi peasant depends upon the Government for a lot of things—particularly the precious canal water! He is grateful to the *Sarkar* for clipping the claws of the Sahukar, who has been replaced in most cases by Government-operated co-operative banks. No peasant can borrow money (as invariably he has to) and still afford to displease the village officials. There are no Civil Liberties Associations in remote Punjab villages to protect a peasant beaten up by a *patwari* or *Numberdar*! The Deputy Commissioner Sahib is the benevolent but terribly strict monarch, while the Governor is a distant Deity.

This is the background of the election campaign in the Punjab. The Unionist Party represents the big loyalist landlord families and the Bureaucracy, the worst reactionary combination imaginable. The Muslim League in the Punjab represents the other landlord families (no less loyalist traditionally) plus the town-dwelling educated middle class, which (in a virile province like the Punjab, both among Muslims and Hindus) produces fanatics and bullies as well as patriots and heroes. The Hindu Mahasabha represents the Hindu capitalists and some of the discontented (inferiority complex-ridden) educated youths. The Congress, frankly, is, and has been for many years, at its lowest ebb in the Punjab—torn by dissensions and cliques, weakened by opportunism, led by lukewarm patriots and second-rate personalities.

Inevitably, because of its own inherent weaknesses, the Congress in the Punjab has leaned this way and that—depending upon the inclinations of the men at the top. Some of them frankly toed the Mahasabha line, at least one flirted with (and later went over to) the Muslim League, while others have sought alliances with the Ahrars, Khaksars, or any one who came along.

But most shocking and utterly disgraceful would be an alliance between the Congress and the Unionists, for the latter are dyed-in-the-blue loyalists and toadies of imperialism. No

patriot can have any truck with those who imprisoned thousands of Congressmen (including most Congress M.L.As) without trial, who placed bans on the entry of distinguished Congress leaders, who shamelessly connived at the torture and persecution of political prisoners, who ordered lathi charges on boys and girls.

More. If it is true that some of the top Punjabi Muslim Leaguers are reactionary ex-Unionists who separated from their old party for purely personal reasons, it is equally true that most of the Unionists are communalists and self-confessed upholders of Pakistan. To defeat the League with their help would be to invite the Devil's agents to punish one's errant brother.

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It is gratifying that the Congress has chosen Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to tour the Punjab. He will clarify issues which have not been clarified by the Punjab Congress leaders. He will expose Unionist machinations and shake the stronghold to its foundations.

But above all, it will rouse the PEOPLE of the Punjab—the simple, naive, sturdy sons of the soil who till the land from Panipat to 'Pindi. So far they have been the dupes of imperialism, oppressed by the Bureaucracy, kept ignorant and servile. They have been used as cannon-fodder. They have been made to regard petty Government officials as the very incarnations of God. Their valour has been used in defence of the ramparts of imperialism, in fighting imperialist wars, even in enslaving other free people. Now, through the Congress, they will free themselves—from imperialism, from feudalism, from ignorance and poverty! Then the Punjab peasant will answer the call given by his national poet, Iqbal, who wrote:

*Bata kīya terī zindagi ka hai raaz ?
 Hazaron bare se hai too kheek baaz !
 Isī khaak men dab gai terī aag
 Sahar ki azaan hogai, ab to jaag !
 Butaan-e-Shu-ub o quabaail ko tore
 Rasum-e-kuhan ke salasil ko tore !*

What is the secret of your existence—
You who have played so long in the dust ?
In this same dust was buried the flame of your spirit.
The morning call has been given, Awake, Awake !
Break the idols of clannish feudalism,
Break the fetters of worn-out traditionalism !

DEAR MR JINNAH

—December 2

I was flattered to receive a letter from you—even if it was only a printed circular letter.

You have asked me for my vote, and again I am flattered. But I am afraid I cannot oblige you. Today is Election Day, but I am not leaving my house to vote for you. I set down the reasons, because it is important that you should know them :

1. Your election circular does not make it clear what position you take on the most vital issue of our national existence: FREEDOM. Are you for the immediate, unconditional withdrawal of British power from India? What steps are you prepared to take to bring about the freedom of India?

2. You say nothing about your attitude towards the second vital issue: ECONOMIC FREEDOM. Do you stand for abolition of landlordism, nationalization of key industries, rigorous control of capitalist enterprises? Are you for the workers and peasants in their struggle for justice and betterment? Do you support their organization into Trade Unions and Kisan Sabhas?

3. You reveal nothing in your letter about your attitude to DEMOCRACY, either. Are you or are you not for equal rights and opportunities for ALL, irrespective of race, religion, caste or colour? Do you support the struggle to abolish such undemocratic and reactionary institutions as the

Princely Order, their feudal privileges and their autocratic rule?

4. Finally, you seem to believe still in the intrusion of religion into politics, while I believe that religion is strictly a personal matter and should not be mixed up with politics. You speak of a 'Muslim nation'—as if the Muslims of Russia, India, China, Europe and Malaya could (by any stretch of imagination ¹) be grouped together as a single political unit, simply because they have the same religion! You promise to 'look at every question coming before the Central Assembly from the standpoint of the Muslim nation', while anyone who gets my vote will have to look at every political question from the standpoint of an anti-Imperialist, freedom-loving Indian, and every economic question from the standpoint of a Socialist.

5. The myth of the 'Muslim nation' (*Millatan jab mit gasen aizza-e imaan hogaeen*—in case you have read Iqbal!) is not the only false concept in your letter. To give but one example of historical inaccuracy, you say that the Congress 'insists on the establishment of a UNITARY Government...' There are at least a dozen resolutions of the Congress and a hundred speeches of Congress leaders to prove that the Congress has consistently demanded a FEDERAL Government, with residuary powers vested in the provinces on a basis of complete self-determination of every territorial unit, including those where Muslims happen to be in a majority.

No, Mr Jinnah, you may get elected, but my vote shall not be cast for you or for any of your nominees. Indeed it shall not be cast at all under a system of COMMUNAL electorate on a religious basis, devised by imperialism to divide the country and prolong the slavery of India. I shall vote whom I can vote as an Indian citizen and not as a Hindu or Muslim or a member of the Scheduled Castes!

THE HOUSE THAT GANDHI BUILT

—December 30

As the train neared Ahmedabad, the first thing I saw was the cluster of mill-chimneys peeping through the early morning mist. And, almost simultaneously, I saw a Red flag with hammer and sickle flying over a worker's brick hut by the side of the railway line. Here was an obvious contrast—Capital and Labour—characteristic of the city that, perhaps, has more millionaires, as well as more mill-workers than any other city in India.

Ahmedabad presents quite a few other contrasts, contradictions and (happily) also examples of cultural synthesis. Emperor Jehangir called it *Gardabad* (The Dusty City) but then Jehangir had not heard of metalled roads and municipal drainage. Ahmedabad is cleaner than most other cities of this size and the credit must go to the Municipality, which, for many years, was run by Congressmen. The same Municipality has named two roads after two bitter opponents of the Congress—Mr Mohamed Ali Jinnah and Doctor Ambedkar!

Ahmedabad owes its importance to modern industry, but it is rich in architectural monuments of considerable historic and artistic interest. Over a thousand miles from Delhi or Agra, it is surprising to find the stamp of the Mughals on many of its old buildings and gardens, and one has to dust up one's text-book of history to remind oneself that more than one Mughal emperor had camped near the city on the Sabarmati, on the same site as 'Shahi Bagh' (Royal Garden) where the modern monarchs of industry live in bungalows more luxurious than many an emperor's palace.

But my interest in Ahmedabad was neither architectural nor industrial, but political. To men of my generation this is the city of the Civil Disobedience Movement, the locale of the Sabarmati Ashram, from where Mahatma Gandhi (with his seventy-two followers) started on the historic and world-shaking Dandi March.

Like a pilgrim bound for a holy shrine I took the first opportunity to visit the Ashram—a couple of miles from the city. Amidst a cluster of neem and sweet lime trees, perched on a highland far above the level of the river-bed, the white-washed, tile-roofed huts still stand as Gandhiji left them—neat, clean, bare, austere. Except for the main hut which was occupied by Gandhiji personally and which is kept untenanted (it is cleaned and aired every day in readiness for his return) all the other buildings are occupied—appropriately enough by Harijan children who come here to learn useful handicrafts and go back with a new dignity hitherto denied to them by caste. And yet a strange, still air of loneliness hangs over the place, as if every thing—every well, every tree, the prayer platform, the tall flag-pole, the cows in the *gaushala*—was waiting for the original occupant to return any moment.

But when Gandhiji left it on that fateful night of March 12, 1930, he swore never to return to the Sabarmati Ashram so long as India was not free. When will he return? Sabarmati asks—and so does India?

A friend who was personally present told me of the atmosphere of the night Gandhiji left the Ashram for the last time, and soon the dusk of the December evening had dissolved into the March night of years ago. It was dark but on both sides of the nearly dried-up river blazed a thousand torches held aloft by those who were keeping a night-long vigil. There was an awe-inspiring hush and none dared speak above a whisper, so tense was the awareness of history. From somewhere came a faint, hardly audible chant that was like the voice of silence. And then light bare feet padded softly over the stretch of sand, and a murmur went through the multitude. The Mahatma had emerged from the Ashram. The March had begun—India's march to freedom! The march is still on!

1946

**When Three Wise Men travelled
All the Way from Britain to India
to Liquidate an Empire—or to Preserve It?**

·IT IS THE ATOM BOMB·

—January 20

The atom bomb has burst over India !

The impossible *has* happened. Two and two still don't make five, but at the moment of writing a thousand-rupee note is not even worth five hundred rupees—in some cases not even worth the price of the paper it is printed on.

Never having set eyes on, much less possessed a thousand-rupee note, I can't say I am much perturbed by the latest Government ordinance. I don't even pretend to understand what it is all about. Do you ?

But I am definitely amused by the all-round pother created by the ordinance. Aren't you ?—unless, of course, you are one of the thousand-rupee-note wallahs yourself !

'It is the atom bomb.' That is how a prominent businessman described the Government order.

And the panic was, indeed, comparable to the nightmarish days of the air-raids on Calcutta in 1942-43 when the Men of Money, not only in the Bengal capital, but also in Bombay, simply ran for their lives—and their lucre ! Those were the days when a local millionaire paid a fortune to a taxi-driver to take him (and his enormous hoard of solid gold) out of Bombay—anywhere that was safe from the expected enemy bombers. Another drove off in a hurry in his *dhoti* and *kurta*—only the *kurta* pocket had a wad of thousand-rupee notes in it ! Today that wad of notes would be worth exactly nothing. A sober thought for money-grabbers and success maniacs !

*Trying to get somewhere—
But when you get there,
Where are you ?*

In the controversy that has begun over the propriety or impropriety, the justice or injustice, of the Government action I am a non-partisan. I distrust this and every move of the present Government, because it is motivated, not by any sense of responsibility towards the common people, but only by a desire to fill bureaucratic coffers. At the same time, I have no sympathy whatever for the thousand-rupee-note wallahs. I know how unscrupulously some of these notes were collected

by them and if they now find themselves in hot waters they wouldn't find me at least shedding tears over their calamity. Nor am I prepared to believe (as one of the journals closely allied to finance-capital would like to have us believe) that the real black-marketeers have remained untouched and only the innocent are suffering as a result of this order. Whatever the intentions of the Government might be, and whatever inconvenience it might cause to the innocent, there can be little doubt that it *has* put a lot of unscrupulous money-grabbers on the spot. They are feeling hot and bothered and don't know what to do with their thousand-rupee notes—to make tea by burning them in the *sigree* or to paper their walls with them. Yes, they *are* feeling rather sore about it all. And I must confess I am rather enjoying their predicament.

To me the whole thing boils down to an exposure of the fantastic instability of the capitalistic system, which is absurd and futile to the point of being comic. Is there a situation in any comic opera, or even in slap-stick comedy, funnier than the spectacle of millionaires going about frantically trying to get rid of their thousand-rupee notes—the same notes, which some of them collected by lying, by cheating, and worst of all, by exploitation of the labour of their fellow-men?

BENGAL IN RE-BIRTH

—January 27

Call it what you will—'The Second Largest City in the British Empire' or 'That Village on the Hooghly'—the more I see of Calcutta the more I like Bombay!

Not that I dispute the greatness of Bengal's famed metropolis—though 'bigness' perhaps would be a more appropriate word! It is bigger than Bombay in many respects. It has a bigger population, bigger and more parks, bigger and fuller and filthier dustbins, larger brothels, offering

a greater variety of human flesh for sale, bigger crowds in the streets, more cars, jeeps, military trucks, taxis and rickshaws running into one another—and into you!

Yes, Calcutta is bigger than Bombay. It has a far bigger deathroll from traffic accidents, more sick destitutes still dying every hour in hospitals, more American soldiers swaggering about in the streets, bigger piles of *kachra* left standing in the middle of the road, taller buildings and more capacious gutters, more statues and statuesque figures, faster and more stream-lined trams and more crowded buses. (They look like rural lorries but the Calcuttaites like to call them buses!)

Calcutta is not only bigger than Bombay, it is also older. Much older. 'Age cannot wither.....' was not said of the beauty of Calcutta. Everything here is stamped with a century-old label. Graeco-Roman columns, old colonial architecture. Venetian blinds, solid Dak Bungalow furniture, box-like horse-driven buggies—all are reminiscent of East India Company days! The sluggish, slow-moving river is chock-full of ancient craft, the same perhaps in which Clive and Hastings arrived in India. You expect to find cobwebs in shop-windows, and sometimes you *can* find them. Any moment, you think, this row of taxis is going to dissolve into a procession of palanquin-carriers and a herald in flowing robes will appear proclaiming: *Hukam John Company Bahadur ka.....*

In more than one sense John Company is still lording it over Calcutta. The Briton is still top dog in this city, and the Calcutta brand of Pukka Sahib is still living in the nineteenth (if not the eighteenth) century. To hear him or his Memsahib talk (or to read him in print in the correspondence columns of the *Statesman*) you would think the world had been standing still around him for two centuries.

The reason for the continued supremacy of the white man in Calcutta lies in Clive Street. It is from the dozen or so buildings in this street that the tentacles of British Big Business reach out towards the financial nerve-centres of the city, the province and the country. It is said that the policies of the Government of India are really formulated here, and

only announced from New Delhi and Simla. It may or may not be true (though it cannot be an accident that the year's most important statement of policy by the Viceroy is *always* made at a dinner of the Calcutta European Association). The fact remains that while the Bengalis have yet to come out of the feudal economy stage, the British financier, industrialist, jute exporter and tea planter are draining away the wealth of eastern India unchecked.

The contrast between the two cities in this respect is significant. Go round Bombay, and you will observe that every important business house, hotel, restaurant, every mill or factory, is owned by an Indian. Go round Calcutta and you almost feel that the city itself is owned by British vested interests. The influence of Indian Big Business is negligible. While both Capital and Labour have made such phenomenal headway in Bombay, which is now ready to pass on from the capitalist to socialist economy, you feel that Calcutta is still burdened by its feudal-Colonial heritage of the past, and has yet to enter the industrial phase.

Like the rest of the world, one may say, Calcutta is jointly owned and dominated by the British *and the Americans*. Yussir, the 'boys' from Boston, Chicago, Milwaukee and all points west are here still—and how! The American way of life is here, too—soda fountains, chocolate sundaes, hotdogs, hamburgers, three-decker sandwiches, platinum blondes in uniform, roadside necking, petting, and.....

Ain't these dusky dames hot, Johnny? Swing, baby, swing at the Cocoonut Grove, even if your hips are not attuned to jazz, for a dollar is a dollar and will buy you rice and curry for four days when the 'boys' have sailed away and you are left alone with your dreams of an apartment on the fabled skyline of New York. Swing, baby, swing, for the curly-haired boy is home-sick and wants to hold you in his arms and imagine that you are Ethel or Joan or Mabel, or whatever his gal back home is called. Here is dough, baby, plenty dough, dough means cash, one dollar is equal to four rupees or sixty-four annas or two hundred and fifty-six pice. Swing, baby, swing, for here is glamour, here is Romance the way you have seen and loved it on the screen. There is a ripe moon in the sky, *he* is Clark Gable and *you* are Dorothy

Lamour, alone in a tropical paradise. You are the 'Jungle Princess', you are the beauty of Baghdad and this is but one of the thousand and one nights—swing, baby, swing or like Scheherezade, you will be dead in the morning. Sing, swing, cling, if you can't dance, just sway your hips, but for Gawd's sake don't think, have another cocktail, drown yourself in drink, sleep if you like, but don't think, don't feel, don't think don't feel don't think don't feel don't.....

With the Americans and their Way of Life, Democracy has arrived in Calcutta. I can see it in action here—in the hotel where I am staying. It is not a swanky 'joint', but the food is good and (I am told) the bar is well stocked. It is 'in bounds' for ALL Allied troops, but ALL Allied troops—those gallant fellow-fighters for Freedom and Democracy—do not come to this place. Only the American Negro soldiers come here and it is not coincidental that the white Americans give it a wide berth. I have seen with my own eyes white American soldiers peeping in through the door and, finding the place filled by their coloured fellow-Americans, slinking away to some other place. Indeed, you can roam all over the city and not find a single instance of a white American soldier fraternizing with a Negro (Talk about OUR caste system, buddy?) There is Democracy for you! There is Freedom, Equality, Fraternity, the Atlantic Charter, the Christian Brotherhood, the American Way of Life!!! Let a new Kipling sing out:

Black is Black and White is White

And never the twain shall meet—

no, not even to have drinks or dinner together! Gone with the wind are the ideals of Abe Lincoln.

'When are you people leaving for home?' I asked a young Doughboy presumably from some place south of the Dixie line. He replied in a rich and broad southern accent, 'Gawd knows.'

The war is over, the Japs are licked, the Mikado has been replaced by MacArthur. Burma has been 'liberated' and returned to Britain's imperial care. But the 'Doughboys' ain't going home yet. Why?

There are quite a lot of American 'boys' asking this question over and over again. They are home-sick and tired

and are beginning to protest against their continued 'detention' in this country. I was told that in their camps and barracks meetings have been held and resolutions passed demanding immediate passage home. And yet for some obscure reason they are still here. Why?

It is said they are here to see through the task of disposal of American army material. It is said they are here because shipping is not yet available to transport them. It is said—but nobody believes it! Meanwhile, rumour seeps through in the camps and the barracks, in the canteens and the Cocoanut Grove, that trouble is brewing in India, that there might be a clash between the 'native' nationalists and the Government, and that in such an emergency it is the cousinly duty of good Americans to come to the aid of their British cousins and fight to save their empire for them!

'Is it true that there is going to be trouble?' my American acquaintance asked me, hoping I would tell him it wasn't, hoping that soon he could go home. And I could only repeat his own words in reply, 'Gawd knows.'

Sick destitutes and home-sick 'Doughboys' trying to have a spurious 'good time' are not the only features of the Calcutta landscape, though often it does appear to be so. And with all my love for Bombay, there *are* a few good points I must concede to Calcutta.

There are the parks—oh how I wish I could steal some of them and take them over to Bombay. But for these natural lungs of the city, Calcutta would have been asphyxiated long ago.

There are the Lakes—and though even a dozen of them do not add up to our own lovely sea, they have a fascinating beauty of their own, a tame, homely beauty as against the turbulent majesty of the ocean.

There are the trees—ancient, wise trees, mute witnesses of the happenings of centuries. What triumphs they have seen, what tragedies, what a cavalcade of Life and Death has passed under them!

There are the people—rooted in the soil like the trees, and, likewise, holding their heads aloft among the clouds, proud and sensitive, imaginative and impractical, patriotic and provincial, soft and sweet like *rasso*.

goolis, lazy and easy-going, and yet with something hard and brittle within. There is an idealistic flame in those dark, limpid eyes, extreme devotion to a cause, even fanaticism. Not men of violence essentially, with no traditions of soldiering, yet formidable revolutionaries and terrorists have risen from among them, combining their native intelligence with their characteristic fatalistic contempt for death. These are not the BEST of God's creatures as some of them naively believe—there *are* no BEST or WORST human beings! But these are people whose intelligence, imagination and idealism have contributed in no small measure to the development of India's national life, and whose record of service and sacrifice is second to none in our struggle for national freedom.

This is my third visit to Calcutta in two years.

I came here first in early 1944. Death stalked its pavements and the destitutes' cries of *Faandao*, begging for *Kanji* or rice-water, were like a dirge proclaiming the passing away of a whole people. It was the marching song of the Caravan of Death. Everywhere people lay dying in front of hotels, restaurants, shops, residential buildings—peasants uprooted from the soil who had trekked hundreds of miles in the hope of getting a morsel of food, and were now quietly dying. And it looked to me that with them Bengal, with all its rich heritage of culture, art, literature, was dying, too.

I came here again in September of last year. The destitutes, at least most of them, had disappeared from the streets. They were either dead or they had returned to their villages, disillusioned about the city, but richer by the knowledge that they could not depend upon anyone else—neither the Government nor the 'charitable' city-dwellers—that they had to help themselves and one another. Among the middle class which, too, had suffered and was still suffering, there was an acuter awareness of the issues involved in the epic tragedy through which their people had passed and I saw this new spirit symbolized in the play *Nav Anna* (The New Harvest) which was then running in Calcutta and which I had specially come to see all the way from Bombay. At last, I felt, there was some hope for Bengal. The land of Tagore was not dead yet.

And now I am here again. I hope it is not a natural temptation for wish-fulfilment that makes me imagine that I am seeing a new Bengal in re-birth. I see it in the faces of people which are sadder but less complacent, sobered by suffering. I see it in the Bengali plays and Bengali films; I hear of it in the new literature that is being produced in Bengal.

Yesterday evening I saw a procession of workers carrying a Red flag, passing through the street, shouting defiant slogans of protest against police excesses on the strikers of a local mill. A posse of mounted police rode by menacingly, but these workers were unafraid. I looked at them and knew that they would not again lie down to die on pavements, nor would they allow their brothers and sisters to die without doing something about it.

This morning I was roused from sleep by shouts from the street and, rushing to the window, saw a dozen school children, carrying a huge tri-colour national flag. They were taking out a procession in connexion with Independence Week. And, looking at them, so eager, so full of spirit, I was reminded of that other and bigger students' procession that had been stopped in Dharmatoola Street not half a mile away on I.N.A. Day. They had not budged from their place. Neither police lathis nor bullets, nor even the appeals of elderly leaders, had made them swerve from the path they had chosen. They had been defiant in the face of death. Some of them had been mown down by police fire, but they had not turned back.

'Because they had the will to die. Bengal shall never die!'

CALCUTTA.

OBITUARY FOR NOBODY

—March 3

Unidentified bodies were still lying unclaimed in various morgues of the hospitals. In the K. E. M. morgue, there were 22 bodies, in Harkisondas Hospital three, of whom one was a boy of nine years.

—Press report

We regret to announce the death of.....

But the body has no name. It is nobody.

No parents, no family, no relations, no friends, no address, no home, no name. Nobody!

It is the body of a beggar-boy attired in rags too big for the shrivelled-up frame. They don't need to perform an autopsy on it. They will find nothing in the caved-in stomach—not even a few grains of undigested rice!

From the top of a six-storied building a couple of newspaper men saw the grim drama of this nobody's death. From such a height he looked even smaller—just a little child in rags, one of those 'Dead End' kids playing about in the gutters. But he was not playing. He was leading a procession of urchins, shouting defiant slogans. Military lorries rumbled past, menacingly close. But he was unafraid. A volley was fired, and he doubled up with a bullet in his stomach. But it was only the first. With the cry of a wounded animal, like one demented he rushed to grapple with the man-with-the-gun. He almost brought him down. But he got what was coming to him—a pattern of holes in his body. By the time the newsmen rushed down to his side he lay sprawled in the centre of the road, looking up at the sky with eyes that already could not see, the agonized lips forming the two words that were his battle-cry. Then he was dead.

This is the body of an Indian who died with *JAI HIND* on his lips.

Did he know what he was dying of and dying for? Did he understand Freedom, Patriotism Imperialism, Revolution, Non-violence, Naval Strike, Section 144, Curfew Orders, Martial Law? Did anyone care to tell him about such things? Did he love his country? Did his country love him? Did he have any country? What had the country done for him that

he should die for it? Did he die for something—or did he just DIE? What did Freedom mean for him? What would Freedom mean for the like of him?.....

The body lies in the morgue—unclaimed uncared for, unloved, unidentified. It is the body of an unknown beggar-boy of nine, a shrivelled-up, tormented, twisted body, lying hunched up like an eternal, haunting question-mark.

SETH SONACHAND'S NIGHTMARE

—March 21

I

Seth Lakshmidas Sonachand had a simple meal consisting only of fifty-six *purees*, seven kinds of non-violent and vegetarian dishes, half a seer of rice soaked in an equal amount of curds, half a dozen *laddoos* and three sliced mangoes. At the end of the meal he had belched noisily to proclaim his satisfaction with the world in general and his Brahmin cook's culinary genius in particular. Then he had laid his portly frame on a soft-mattressed bed draped in *shuddh* white khaddar. Within the noble mountainous stomach there was peace and—fermentation!

As the servant expertly massaged his legs and back, the woolly clouds of sleep slowly gathered round Seth Sonachand's head. In a pleasant pinkish haze, his mind roved over his vast properties. He thought of his textile mills in Bombay and Ahmedabad, he thought of the jute mills that he had only recently purchased from a British trust in Calcutta. That deal had given him a great deal of happiness. It was in the nature of a patriotic service. It was the QUIT INDIA movement in action. Wasn't he, Seth Lakshmidas Sonachand, forcing foreign finance to *quit India*?

Yes, he was a patriot to the core. He believed implicitly in non-violence, he wore home-spun khaddar, he ate sparingly and unostentatiously from silver plate, he observed fasts when

he ate nothing for the whole day except a few glasses of fruit juice and a bowl of sago pudding. For further proof of his patriotism he donated liberally to the funds of the Congress and his mansions in Delhi and other provincial capitals provided lavish hospitality to the national leaders. But Seth Lakshmidas was not a narrow-minded partisan. He could also give sumptuous garden parties in honour of the *Qaid-e-Azam* and other leaders of the Muslim League. Indeed, there were occasions when his patriotism could embrace even the Communists. For instance, in August, 1942, he definitely approved of the Communists' endeavours to prevent the strike in his textile mills in Bombay which were then working night and day to supply khaki cloth to the Army. In Ahmedabad, however, he was quite willing to close down his mills in obedience to the Congress mandate, and it was purely coincidental that such action netted him a few millions by creating cloth scarcity and thus boosting up prices . . .

It had become a life-long habit with Seth Lakshmidas Sonachand, before retiring to sleep, to make a mental inventory of all the business enterprises that he owned or controlled. It gave him a deep spiritual satisfaction to think of this gigantic network.

The list was never complete, for the agents and associates of Seth Lakshmidas were ever busy extending the frontiers of his financial empire. A daily newspaper, a mill, a colliery, a plot of land, a timber forest—at any time he might become the owner of any of these. Moreover, sleep came easily to Seth Lakshmidas and he was snoring before his mind had reached the end of the list.

But today he could not sleep peacefully. Maybe, it was some disturbing combination of proteins, fats and carbohydrates in his food, or possibly the news in that morning's papers, or even perhaps an uneasy conscience that shaped the nightmare that haunted Seth Lakshmidas and caused him to moan and groan fitfully throughout the period of his siesta. As he confided to Seth Yusuf Paisawala next day, he was not afraid of nightmares, but this one had the germ of frightening reality in it.

Walking out of the corridors of wakefulness and emerging into a foggy 'never-never land', Seth Lakshmidas saw

a vast stream of humanity entering a pandal, spacious enough to accommodate half a million. It must be a Congress meeting, he thought, and went in, hoping as usual to be given a seat on the dais or at least in the Distinguished Visitors' Gallery. But he was dismayed to find himself surrounded by the rudest and most disrespectful horde of ragamuffins, who paid not the least attention to him. Even if it is a Communist or a Socialist meeting, thought the Seth, they ought to treat me with respect, for haven't I been one of their benefactors through my son, who has always talking of the atomic revolution of August '42, and my daughter, who subscribes to *The People's Age* and always forces me to buy tickets for Soviet film shows which I never attend! These considerations, however, proved of no avail and, pushed and jostled, he was unceremoniously forced to squat on the ground, sandwiched between a dark-skinned Maratha and a burly Pathan both of whom he recognized as workers in one of his mills.

Recovering his breath and adjusting his well-padded body on the rough and uneven floor, he looked in the direction of the dais, where he was still hoping to get a seat of honour. Two huge flags were crossed behind the presidential rostrum—the national tri-colour and the Red flag of the revolutionary workers. A red streamer hung over the platform read: *All-India Leftist Parties United Rally*. Seth Lakshmidas's heart sank within him.

'Comrades!' A powerful voice boomed through the loud-speaker. 'We who are gathered here today belong to several different parties and there are many who yet belong to no party. We are Communists and Socialists and members of the Forward Bloc, Trade Unionists and Kisan Sabha workers; impatient youths from the students' ranks, old terrorists as well as tried Gandhi-ites steeped in the traditions of non-violence. We are Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs and Christians and Agnostics and Atheists. Present amidst us are the veterans of the Ghadar Party, the heroes of the KAMAGATA MARU; the stalwarts of the *Hijrat* movement who trekked thousands of miles over perilous uncharted paths across half a dozen frontiers to escape from the vast prison house that was India; the Khilafatist colleagues of the Ali Brothers, the earliest non-co-operators and no-rent strikers; the terrorists from Bengal

and the Punjab, comrades of Bhagat Singh and Dutt, who have spent from ten to twenty years in imperialist jails; the Satyagrahis of Bardoli and Dharasana; the Communist prisoners of Meerut; the leaders of the first textile strike in Bombay; the founders of the Independence of India League; the organizers and officers of the Hindustan Republican Army; the founders of the Congress Socialist Party; the obscure leaders of the State people's movement; the underground workers of August '42; the officers and men of the Indian National Army, comrades and colleagues of Subhas Chandra Bose in exile.....

'We are a varied lot, and many wonder how we could come together in this united rally.' And Seth Lakshmidas wondered how the speaker, far away on the platform, had read his thoughts. 'I shall tell you why and how: We have come together because, after years of hair-splitting and head-breaking differences and sectional prejudices, we have at last come to realize that we are really all agreed on the fundamental problems of our people. What are these problems and what is the solution in each case?

'The first and foremost problem is that of imperialist domination. All of us are not only uncompromisingly opposed to this imperialism, but also determined to end it root and branch. We will not tolerate any watering down of the national demand by constitutionalists and weak-kneed elements in our national movement.

'The second big problem is that of the poverty of our people and, therefore, we are agreed that along with imperialism we have also to strike at the roots of all systems of exploitation which have been flourishing, thanks to the support given to them by the foreign usurpers. Zamindari must go. The land must belong to the peasants. All the key industries must be nationalized.' Seth Lakshmidas got distinctly hot under the collar as the speaker went on: 'The stranglehold of the capitalists must be removed from the necks of our long-suffering people. Our national movement must be purged of these vested interests who exploit the patriotic fervour of the people for their own ulterior and base motives of greed and grab.....

'All of us—Communists, Congress Socialists and members of the Forward Bloc—are in complete agreement with regard

to the proper approach to these problems. And we have decided for the time being jointly to fight for freedom and social justice, postponing our ideological discussions of revolutionary theory and technique to a later date. At the moment when our freedom is the biggest issue before us, and when we are faced with the basic fact of the grim poverty and destitution of our people, with the prospect of another horrible famine glaring us in the face, we cannot afford the luxury of indulging in such unnecessary dialectics and debate. When our house is on fire it is criminal to have theoretical discussions whether the best way of putting out a conflagration is to use water, sand or fire-extinguisher!

‘Nor can we allow religious and ultra-ethical considerations to temper our stern judgment of those who have caused this conflagration in our house. While adhering to the fundamental principles of humanity and justice, we cannot give up our right to use every form of pressure against the exploiters and usurpers who themselves are the very embodiment of violence.

‘The importation of religion into the sphere of politics, we have noted, has created unfortunate complications in our national movement and given a fillip to reactionary political and social tendencies. We are determined to purge politics of this religious importation, because we feel that we can build Indian unity only on the foundation of the secular political and economic demands of the common people.

‘I must confess that we have not behaved well with one another in the past. We have called one another vulgar and slanderous names—traitors, fifth columnists, Fascists, collaborators, etc. This has delighted and benefited none but the imperialists and the exploiters. We should not oblige them any longer. While recognizing—and respecting—the differences in our ideological approach, we must concentrate on the points in common and strive unitedly to fight our common enemies—the enemies of our country, the enemies of our common people.’

Thunderous applause greeted the end of the speech, and there were shouts of ‘*Inqilab Zindabad*’, ‘Leftists, Unite’, ‘Up, up with Revolution’, ‘*Jai Hind*’.

As the applause died down, P. C. Joshi, General Secretary of the Communist Party, jumped up and shouted: '*Jai Hind!* I demand the immediate release of our Comrade Jaiprakash Narain.' This was once again greeted with a terrific burst of applause, which was like a slap in the face of Seth Lakshmidas.

Up rose slim, pale Yusuf Meherally, who declared on behalf of the Congress Socialists: 'I know my Communist friends have been abusing us and calling us fifth columnists and Fascists. Perhaps we have been equally crude in our attacks on them. But I assure them that we have decided to bury the hatchet and work with them for the freedom of India and the economic emancipation of our people.' The cheers were like a sledge-hammer falling on Seth Lakshmidas's egg-bald head.

The next to rise was Aruna Asaf Ali, who received a great ovation even before she had spoken a single word. Adhikari, of the Communist Party, rushed to the platform and garlanded her with a string of red roses. She acknowledged the compliment on behalf of her underground colleagues and pledged their loyalty to the revolutionary united front of the Left. Seth Lakshmidas felt an army of red ants crawling over his body.

Major Shah Nawaz, Captain Dhillon, Captain Lakshmi, and other representatives of the I. N. A. presented a smart military appearance as they rose and pledged *their* support to the united front. Seth Lakshmidas's breath came in hard short gasps and he felt suffocated.

The climax was reached when a former Muslim Leaguer with Socialist leanings stood up and declared that if Indian politics was to be reorganized on the basis of the principles of this united front, Muslims like him would have no misgivings and the Pakistan demand would become redundant. This was followed by the announcement that Mian Iftikharuddin, former President of the Punjab Congress, was rejoining the Congress to work for a Leftist reorientation of the policies and programme of the great national organization. Seth Lakshmidas thought he would collapse any moment.

Then came a demonstration of workers and peasants from all parts of India, with banners flying and bands playing, who marched—half a million strong—with heads held high

and a new hope in their eyes. Seth Lakshmidas was afraid to look into their eyes for he feared to see in them the shadow—of his own doom !

II

—*March 31*

Seth Lakshmidas Sonachand's mind works slowly laboriously, like a hippopotamus stalking its prey, in the jungle, but once it gets going nothing can stop it. Generally regarded as immobile and lethargic because of his immense bulk, he can yet act swiftly in a moment of crisis. And where self-interest is in peril he can be as cunning as a fox, as slippery as an eel, and as diabolically patient as a spider !

Even as the proceedings of the ALL-INDIA LEFTIST PARTIES UNITED RALLY were just starting, Seth Lakshmidas's mind, by an automatic reflex action, had begun to plan out a defensive strategy to defeat this devilish conspiracy to overthrow his financial empire. By the time the workers' and peasants' demonstration was reaching its uproarious climax, the Master Plan to Save Capitalism in India was ready.

It is well known on the Bombay Stock Exchange that with Seth Lakshmidas Sonachand, to think is to act. On one occasion he is reputed to have taken only five seconds to decide to sell his six million worth of shares in a firm importing Japanese goods and buy instead stock of equal value in a steel plant—a decision that was worth 50 million a year later when war broke out, for the Japanese trading firm was dissolved and steel shares rose steeply in value. This time he did not take even five seconds to decide on his course of action.

Just as the last squadron of workers was marching past, Seth Lakshmidas leaned over to a young man wearing a hammer-and-sickle badge in his coat lapel who sat next to him and whispered, 'Comrade, isn't it good to see that the Trotskyites, too, have fallen in line with the United Front of the Leftists ?'

'Trotskyites ?' The young man spat out with a violent display of contempt, 'You don't mean to say those dirty Fascist hirelings have dared to sneak in here, too !'

'You can see for yourself. There are several well-known Trotskyites sitting right there on the dais.'

The young man with the hammer-and-sickle badge did not wait even for his informant to point out the alleged Trotskyites on the dais. With a clenched fist raised he rushed to the dais.

Meanwhile, a second young man, dressed in a khadi suit, had become interested in the conversation. When he asked the Seth, 'What did that betrayer of the August Revolution say to you?' he could be certain that here was a Congress Socialist. So the Seth replied, 'Oh, nothing. He was merely saying that the Congress Socialists should not be allowed in this Rally because they are Fascists.'

'Did he? Then I am damned if I agree to sit with C I D. informers who got our leaders arrested in 1942. That's what these Communists did.' He, too, was in a hurry to run to the dais to press his point of view.

After that it was a simple matter for Seth Lakshmidas confidentially to inform a Forward Bloc member that this Rally was a Communist manoeuvre to forestall the possibility of Netaji Bose's being alive and returning to India to lead all genuine freedom fighters, and then to tell a second Communist that the move for the Leftist Rally had come from the Right Wing Labourites of Britain, who wanted to form a world bloc against Soviet Russia. He also helpfully suggested to a Congress Socialist that Louis Fischer should be invited to address the Rally, later telling a Sovietophile that notorious anti-Stalinists were being invited with a view to stigmatizing the Soviets. Finally, he urged a youthful radical to move a resolution banishing religion from India, and then informed a bearded old Muslim revolutionary of the Khilafat days that the hot-headed young Atheists were going to turn the Rally, into a platform for preaching Atheism.

Then, with the satisfaction of having done a good spot of work, Seth Lakshmidas Sonachand relaxed and waited for the fireworks to begin.

He did not have to wait long.

'Comrades!' The powerful voice boomed through the loud-speaker. But before he could go further, there were shouts from sections of the audience, 'No Communist jargon.' '*Hindustani men bolo*'. 'Let him speak', 'These Communists...', 'Shut up', 'You shut up yourself', 'Is

this democracy?' and then the thousand throats simultaneously, shouting—'Silence! SILENCE!!'

At last, but for murmurs and mutterings here and there, some sort of silence was restored and the Voice went on: 'Our first job is to elect a panel of chairmen to conduct the deliberations of this Rally. I propose the following names which have been selected to ensure all-party representation within the United Front:

'Yusuf Meherally to represent the Congress Socialists, in the absence of Jaiprakash Narain, the General Secretary of the C.S.P., who is still in an imperialist prison; S. A. Dange to represent the Communists; R. S. Ruiker to represent the Forward Bloc; Aruna Asaf Ali to represent the underground revolutionaries; and Hasrat Mohani to represent the Old Guard of the radicals.'

While these names were cheered by the majority of those present, dissenting voices were also heard from different corners. Rose the Voice, strong and clear above the increasing rumble of confusion. 'I want you all to accept these five, not in their individual capacity—though each of them bears a name hallowed by suffering and sacrifice in the cause of our people—but as representing five streams of sincere radical activity which can become a mighty torrent of revolution if they are merged together. May I take it that you approve of these persons and the principles of their respective movements or organizations being represented in this United Front of the Left?'

Cries of 'No, no' were mingled with shouts of 'Yes, yes', and Seth Lakshmidas Sonachand knew he had won the first round. Then came speaker after speaker to the dais to oppose the inclusion of one or another person or group in the United Front, and the symphony of discord, steadily rising to a crescendo was a sweet melody to the ears of the owner of thirteen textile mills, three jute mills and six newspapers!

'Comrades!' began a Communist Party spokesman, and when there were murmurs of protest against this form of address he declared, 'I will not give up the use of a word which has such glorious traditions in the history of the proletarian revolution, however much disrupters and deviationists might protest.'

'Comrades!' he went on, 'you are well aware that the C.P.I., like the C.P.S.U. and the C.P.G.B., following the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist line of rigid flexibility based on the fundamental principles of dialectical materialism as interpreted in the light of historical developments, has always upheld and worked for the United Front of all genuine and sincere, freedom fighters. In turn we have tried to form a United Front of the Congress and the Communists, of the Forward Bloc and the Communists, of the League and the Communists, of the Congress and the League, and of the Congress, the League and the Communists. That we have not succeeded in any of these attempts is only a proof of our sincerity and the soundness of the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist ideology.

'Therefore, while whole-heartedly supporting the ideals of a Leftists' United Front, we would like to warn you against the inclusion of elements which are proved to have a Fascist character and Fascist tendencies. I refer to the disruptive and dangerous role of the Forward Bloc and the Congress Socialists in 1942-43. At a time when the homeland of Socialism, the Soviet Union, was threatened by Fascist invasion and the glorious Red Army stood like a rock between Freedom and Fascism, at a time when the Imperialist war had definitely been turned into a People's War and reactionaries like Churchill were sworn allies of the Soviet Union, these traitorous elements—this Fifth Column of Japan and Germany—fanned the flames of rebellion in the country, sabotaged lines of communication and disrupted "Production for Defence", organized workers' strikes and gave the call for Revolution—both of which functions, you know, are historically the exclusive copyright property of the Communists! In encouraging a violent, Imperialist campaign at such a juncture, they consciously and deliberately played the game of the Japanese Fascists, who would have certainly overrun India from the east had not the Red Army been fighting the Nazi armies in the west! It is unthinkable for us to make common cause with such traitors and Fifth Columnists.

'One more reason why we cannot subscribe to the United Front as at present constituted. We note three Muslim names—Aruna Asaf Ali, Yusuf Meherally and Hasrat Mohani—none of which has been approved by the Muslim

League, which, as the sole national organization of the Muslim nation—those who dispute the right of Muslims to be a nation are referred to Comrade Stalin's thesis on nationalities—has the exclusive right to nominate Muslims to any position in any legislative body or party—except, of course, the Communist Party! This is a direct infringement of the Pakistan demand of *Qaid-e-Azam* Jinnah, who wants an Islamic state to be run in strict conformity to the laws of the Marxian *Shariat*. As such, we cannot accept the basis of the United Front as implied in the panel of five names proposed.'

And Seth Lakshmidas Sonachand felt happier than even when he had taken possession of the three jute mills.

Throughout the speech of the Communist spokesman, there were constant interruptions from the Congress Socialists and members of the Forward Bloc, who resented the aspersions cast on them. Hardly had the Communist speaker finished speaking than a Congress Socialist speaker rushed to the platform and monopolized the microphone.

'Comrades and friends of the Atomic August Revolution! As a representative of the only genuine Socialist party born within the heart of the national freedom movement, I feel it my duty to repudiate the statement of the Communist speaker. Those of you who have read the works of Burnham, Max Eastman, Louis Fischer or their distilled essence in the pamphlets written by M. R. Masani and published by Tata Sons, Ltd. (here Seth Lakshmidas made a mental note: "I must also start publishing Socialist literature") know very well that Communism today is completely divorced from real Marxism or even Leninism. Under the ruthless bloody dictatorship of Stalin, freedom has been extinguished in the Soviet Union and all the countries under the Stalinist ironheel. Do we want such a dictatorship to be installed in India, too? (Cries of "No! No!") Then let us keep out these so-called Communists who are really agents of Stalin interested in extending the frontiers of the Red Czar's empire to India.

'But that is not all. We have got concrete proof that during the glorious Atomic Revolution, the Communists acted as *agents provocateurs* and informers of the police and the C.I.D., Communist girls were singing and dancing to entertain foreign troops, and P. C. Joshi was all along receiving

secret instructions from Maxwell, who, along with Lord Wavell is also a secret agent of Stalin! Can we forget that the Communists described Netaji Bose and his I.N.A. as Fifth Columnists and traitors? No. We cannot for a moment countenance the presence of such anti-national elements in any United Front that we might agree to join.'

To counter the charges of the Congress Socialist, a Communist started reading out a list of his comrades who, he alleged, had been assaulted, or in some cases even killed, by Fascist *goondas*—that is, the Forward Bloc and the Congress Socialists'. This provoked a Congress Socialist to shout that the Communists had all along been attacking Congress workers throughout the elections.

The pandemonium that ensued, the wrangle between the Communists and Socialists and Forward Blocists and Royists and the non-Party Socialists was the sweetest music that Seth Lakshmidas had heard in many years. He was a little disturbed when a worker began to shout, 'What about an increase in our wages, what about nationalization of industry?' and a peasant shouted, 'Let us first abolish the Zamindari,' but soon these voices were drowned in cries of 'Left deviationist', 'Stalinist hirelings', 'Fascist *goondas*', etc.

To wind up his noble work, the Seth took off his two shoes and in the midst of the confusion, threw one at the Communists and the other at the Congress Socialists. Instantaneously, there were shouts of 'Fascist *goondas* are throwing bombs', 'Red ruffians are attacking us with imperialist hand-grenades', blows began to be exchanged, lathis were brought into play and within a few minutes several people had been stabbed.

And as, from a safe corner, Seth Lakshmidas watched the results of his handiwork, he laughed and laughed and laughed at his cleverness and the stupidity of those who dared to challenge the supremacy of his class.

When Seth Lakshmidas Sonachand woke up his fat belly, full of *laddoos* and *purees*, was still shaking with laughter. The sun was shining brightly. The image of Lakshmi on the wall smiled benignly at her devotee. The worker was still in his slums, the peasant still starved in his mud-hut. The ideological pundits were still wrangling over the *Shastras* of Karl Marx and the Deviationists were

unconvinced by the Party Line Orthodoxy. All was well with the world, which, thank the Lord, had once again been saved for Exploitation.

SWEEPERS ON STRIKE

—April 21

'It is one of the most amazing paradoxes of Indian Society,' my father (alas, no more) used to say, 'that those who make their clothes dirty are supposed to be clean, while those who wash them are supposed to be unclean; that those who cause all the dirt and filth and excreta are supposed to be clean, while those who remove this filth and clean our homes and streets are supposed to be unclean!'

I was reminded of this again and again during the days of the sweepers' strike, when garbage dumps rose menacingly high in every street and a stale, foul stench filled the air from Colaba to Mahim Causeway. For peculiarly enough, the sight of these garbage hills did not make ordinary citizens like me bitter or angry against the sweepers. Indeed, every whiff of the awful stench, every ugly pile at a street corner, made one realize the magnitude of the debt that we owe to the sweeper community for the social service they have been rendering to us for thousands of years. Not that I was unaware of the danger of epidemics that might be caused by the accumulated filth already crawling with vermin, but I was equally aware of the greater disease that this strike was helping to banish from our society—the disease, the canker, of untouchability!

The Harijan has been oppressed for centuries, ground down and buried in filth, not because of something about the four *Varnas* written in some scriptures or ancient legal codes but because the sanction of religion was used to allot him permanently the lowest position in the economic structure. It is only because of their economic helplessness that they have had to endure this degradation and misery. It follows,

then, that only by their economic betterment can they be helped to raise themselves culturally and socially, and ultimately regain a status of equality in a new casteless Indian Society.

It is said that the demands of the Bombay sweepers were too extravagant, that they had already been assured of a consolidated wage of fifty or fifty-five rupees per month. But I ask: Who is to judge what is adequate compensation for this kind of work? You and I—who hold our handkerchiefs to our noses and walk hurriedly past whenever we smell or see a garbage dump? The high-caste plutocrats who need half a dozen servants to dust their rooms and would not even touch a broom, much less clean a lavatory? Society ladies whose expense on eau-de-cologne and rose-water was doubled during the sweeper's strike—'Oh, my dear, one simply can't drive past the Market these days'? Anyone who lays down the law that thirty or forty or fifty rupees is more than a reasonable wage for a sweeper is welcome to get a job in the Municipal Health Department on these terms and prove his theory by practice! They talk of five rupees per month as more than adequate allowance for sweepers doing 'unclean' work. I dare them to enter a sewer once, and if they can remain there for five minutes they would have earned five rupees—I will pay them a rupee per minute! No, not all the statistics you can muster can cancel the fact that the sweeper is doing an unpleasant but socially essential task and, therefore is entitled to lay down his terms for doing this work.

It is alleged—and it might be true—that interested parties have exploited the grievances of the sweepers for their political ends. But that does not in any way affect the justice of their demands. Moreover it is unfair to dismiss the economic demands of workers simply because they are supported by some parties for political reasons. That sort of argument was used against Gandhiji himself when he used Salt as a symbol of Satyagraha, against him again when he glorified the Charka to break Britain's textile monopoly, against the Congress when, under Pandit Nehru's leadership, it took up the grievances of the U. P. peasants in 1934, against the Communists when they raised a cry against the hoarders during the Bengal famine against the Congress again when it took up the issue of the I. N. A. prisoners, and recently

against both Communists and underground Socialists when they provoked and supported the strike of the Naval ratings. One can understand this sort of reasoning being used by the Government and the vested interests to discredit a popular rising against economic injustice, but certainly it does scant credit to well-known Congress leaders to talk like that.

The only way you can prevent opportunistic exploitation of economic grievances is to REMOVE THE GRIEVANCES by giving a fair deal to the workers!

History will record to Gandhiji's everlasting glory that it was he who gave back their self-respect to the submerged millions of untouchables, that it was he who roused the conscience of higher-caste Hindus against the injustices and humiliations that have been heaped upon the hopeless outcasts. He prepared the psychological background for an assault on this citadel of injustice and reaction. He shook the caste system to its roots by doing the sweepers' work with his own hands, by inter-dining with untouchables, by admitting them to his ashrams on terms of equality, by organizing schemes for their education and uplift. But experience has proved that sentimental gestures, however sincere, do not ensure social equality unless they are backed by far-reaching economic and social readjustments. The ultimate and complete redemption of the untouchables will be achieved not by social reform, but by science. Sanitary plumbing alone can save them from the unclean tasks allotted to them by society—tasks whose unsavoury nature is not changed by conferring the title of 'Harijans' (Children of God) on the untouchables!

But, meanwhile, social pressure by concerted trade union action is a legitimate weapon which they can use to get their grievances redressed. The Bombay sweepers' strike was proof positive that the down-trodden and the oppressed are no longer in a mood to suffer injustice. Its successful culmination will be a source of strength and inspiration, not only to untouchables elsewhere in India, but also to victims of injustice everywhere in the world, in their struggle for social justice and economic freedom. But, while it lasted, I hope, the strike impressed upon us all the vital service that the sweepers render to the community, and how poorly they are

compensated for it. What are a few garbage dumps left standing for some days and the inconvenience they caused to us when viewed against the background of exploitation of untouchables that has gone on for centuries?

ANOTHER BASTILLE FALLS

—May 5

It was dismissed in a couple of lines shoved into some obscure corner on the back pages of newspapers. And yet it is news that is fundamentally more interesting, more important, more dynamic, more historic and truly epoch-making than the death of Hitler, the Atom Bomb raid on Hiroshima, the meetings of the U.N.O., the Cabinet Mission in New Delhi!

THE RICKSHAW IS TO BE ABOLISHED IN CHINA!

To my mind, this news is as important in the history of the struggle for human freedom as the Fall of Bastille, Abraham Lincoln's declaration of the emancipation of slaves, the abolition of serfdom in Europe, women winning the right to vote, the advent of universal suffrage.

For the institution of the rickshaw, in China and in India, has been symbolic of the utter degradation of the human personality under a feudal-colonial system. In no country that is truly free from foreign and indigenous exploitation would such a travesty of labour be permitted.

Man dragging man, man turned into a beast of burden, man reduced to the level of a slave! In Simla and in Mussoorie, in Nainital and Murree, in Calcutta and Colombo, in Singapore and Shanghai I have seen the rickshaw in action—this infernal machine for the exploitation and degradation of man this modern juggernaut driven by men to crush their bones, their muscles, their lungs, their very soul.

Fat bureaucrats in dinner jackets and their wives in jewels and furs being driven in their rickshaws through blinding rain up the steep incline to the Viceregal Lodge in Simla for a Ball! Bulky *talugdars* and their bulkier Begums installed

in couples in double-seater rickshaws—and panting, coughing, puny little coolies on the almost perpendicular slopes of Mussoorie! A fat white planter being dragged by exhausted two-legged beasts on the roads of Colombo! An American soldier and his girl going for midnight revels on the Lakes in Calcutta—driven by a dark, thin Indian with his stomach caved in and ribs sticking out! Rich, pot-bellied Chinese merchants being pushed up to their palaces on the hills round Singapore! International traffickers in narcotics and female flesh, gangsters and brothel-keepers in Shanghai kicking the stunted Chinese rickshaw boys when they fail to run fast enough to reach the notorious night clubs in time!!

The rickshaw has gone wherever the shadow of Empire has fallen, wherever a degenerate, decaying feudal society has been checked in its inevitable doom by the arrival of foreign imperialism. Its invention may not be the blackest among the black deeds of empire-builders, but it certainly ranks with the *begaar*, (forced labour), the Colour Bar, the indentured 'slave' system and the virtual serfdom in the plantations, among the major blessings of the British Raj.

And precisely because the rickshaw is a symbol of imperialist exploitation and the rickshaw-puller an embodiment of the poignant suffering of downtrodden humanity, many a sensitive writer has been inspired to depict the inequity and callousness of this system through the melancholy, stooped, doomed figure of a rickshaw coolie. (For the most important and vital thing to remember about a rickshaw coolie is that his expectancy of life is only half that of an average human being. Remember that when, on your next visit to a hill station you light-heartedly call out, 'Eh, rickshawwala!'.)

TESTAMENT OF A FRIEND OF THE JEWS

—May 12

I am PRO-JEW and not ANTI-JEW. I am proud and privileged to have many Jews among my friends.

I have nothing but admiration for the great Jewish people and their qualities of survival. I have nothing but sympathy for the Jewish victims of the Hitler terror, and nothing but loathing and contempt for all those—be they Nazis or the anti-Semites of Britain and America—who look down upon the Jews or are opposed to assimilating the Jews in their respective countries and nations.

The Jews have suffered a horrible lot for several thousand years. All sorts of humiliations and indignities have been heaped on them. If they have developed insular racial tendencies it is because of this persecution—and not *vice versa*, as the anti-Semites would have us believe.

I DO NOT believe that the Jews are the CHOSEN PEOPLE—no more than are the British, the Germans, the Americans OR THE INDIANS! Any Jew who believes in the Chosen People myth is a pitiable case of racial narcissism or inverted inferiority complex.

I am pro-Jew because Jews are people, human beings like all of us. Bad and good, and, greedy and generous, and rich and poor, and poltroons and poets and philosophers, and crooks and saints and musicians and scientists. Just like any other people.

I believe that the Jews, in whichever country they happen to be born, have a birthright to all the privileges of citizens, that anyone who deprives them of these rights and persecutes them is an enemy of humanity.

I have every sympathy with the homeless Jewish victims of the anti-Semitic barbarism of Europe. I can imagine how they have suffered, how they feel, for humiliations and sufferings of our own people have made us Indians sensitive to the woes of others.

I want everything to be done to help rehabilitate them. Those who want to go back to lands of their birth should be given every possible facility to do so. Those who want to

settle down elsewhere should be accommodated in the underpopulated regions of the world which culturally and climatically would suit the Jews uprooted from Europe. There is Australia. There is America. There is the Soviet Union.

BUT—and it is an emphatic 'But'—the European, non-Palestinian (and I underline the words EUROPEAN, NON-PALESTINIAN) Jews have no legal or moral right to claim Palestine as their homeland. The sacred traditions of the Jews, associating the origin of their faith with Palestine, are an irrelevant and mythical consideration in this twentieth century. The descendants of the original Jews who migrated to Europe from Palestine thousands of years ago (and through no fault of the Arabs) cannot now come back and claim the country as their 'homeland'. The European Jew has a culture and a way of life quite alien to Palestine. It is no more his homeland than Arabia is the homeland of the Indian Muslims, or Bihar the homeland, of the Chinese, Japanese or Ceylonese Buddhists! If religious associations were valid in such issues, then the European Christians, too, would claim Palestine as their homeland.

To justify Jewish infiltration into Palestine on the plea of Nazi persecution having rendered thousands of Jews homeless is irrelevant. Why should the Arabs of Palestine be made to suffer for the crimes of Hitler and Rosenberg?

The talk of the improvement and modernization of Palestine by Jewish efforts is to give sanction to a hollow imperialist argument. Self-government is any day better than good government, and I would prefer India to be free than to have all the railways and telegraphs and air lines and hospitals that the British are supposed to have bestowed on us.

It is better that Palestine remain a desert than non-Palestinians should come and turn it into a paradise of factories and mechanized farms.

Palestine belongs to the people of Palestine—be they Muslims, Christians or Jews. No outsider has any business to be there—except with the goodwill of the people of Palestine.

I maintain that American sympathy with the Jews on this Palestine issue is pure hypocrisy and bunk. I challenge President Truman to say that an American Jew, however eminent or qualified, has even one per cent chance of becoming

the President of the U.S.A. I challenge him to say that there is no discrimination against Jews in the social and political life of America. I challenge him to open the vast undeveloped spaces of his country to homeless Jews from Europe.

The British, I maintain, are playing the eternal 'Divide and Rule' imperialist game in Palestine. They double-crossed both the Arabs and the Jews in the First World War, they introduced Jewish immigrants into Palestine to keep down the Arabs and to perpetuate their imperialist stranglehold on Palestine and the whole of the Middle East. They encouraged the false and dangerously chauvinistic tendencies of the Zionists; they have themselves to blame if today they are reaping the bitter harvest in the form of Jewish terrorism and political assassinations.

Finally, I believe that the whole basis of Zionism and the 'Jewish Homeland' propaganda is reactionary, jingoistic and theocratic. To support it is to put the clock of history back to the days of religious states.

To claim an exclusive Homeland is to admit defeat at the hands of the anti-Semites and to endorse the Hitlerian policy of excluding Jews from citizenship in Christian-majority countries.

The Zionist Jews are playing a coercive, imperialistic and capitalistic role in Palestine and cannot claim our sympathy simply because, for the time being, they happen to be anti-British. The Jewish capitalists, like non-Jewish capitalists, have their own axes to grind and are using their people as dupes to serve their own ends. It is not easy these days to get an 'undeveloped' poor country like Palestine to exploit, and no wonder they want it for themselves behind the 'Homeland' facade.

It is up to the clear-headed rationalists, Socialists, Communists and true democrats among the Jews to disabuse the minds of their people of the myths propagated by Zionists. At a time when their unhappy experiences in Europe have embittered the Jews and thus made them susceptible to chauvinistic ideology, it is not an easy task to stand up against the prevailing sentiment. And yet, in the larger interests of humanity and for the ultimate good of the Jews themselves, it must be done. The Jews must learn, as every other people must learn, that tyranny cannot be killed by

tyranny, that racial persecution is only perpetuated by racial exclusiveness, and that no argument can validate the imposition by force of a foreign element on a country against the expressed wishes of the people of that country.

WHILE THEY TALKED AT SIMI

—May 19

The road is steep and winding, and the afternoon sun throws a fantastic pattern of fluid shadows on the ground. Through the rich-green, aromatic foliage of tall, majestic pines one can glimpse far away the snow-covered peaks of the Himalayas—pure white, eternal!

The road is steep and winding, and the journalist puffs and pants as he negotiates the gradient, envying the tall, erect, khadi-clad figure striding along effortlessly a couple of hundred yards in front as he disappears round the bend. That is Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the man from the rugged hills of the Frontier, solid like a granite rock himself, mute and unmovable.

There is a clatter of iron-shod hoofs on the hard grey road and the journalist hurries to one side just as a familiar figure in chocolate coloured *sherwani*, tight white trousers and white cap gallops past on a white-spotted horse—Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, youthfully active and irrepressible as ever, the knight-errant of Indian politics, the Prince Charming off to kill the dragon. . . .

Round the bend, the journalist comes up in front of the, old, cold stone walls of the Viceregal Lodge, edged by emerald lawns and flower-beds that are a riot of colour. (This is the residence, he remembers, of the collector of *Other Men's Flowers*!) In the portico, beyond the two khaki-clad Guards, immobile like statues, stand a bunch of Viceroyal *chaprasis* in technicolour uniforms of bright-red-and-gold, looking more imposing and picturesque than some of the Maharajas you can see on the Mahalaxmi race course.

A straggling group of photographers and cine-camera-men is at hand to record the arrival of the delegates for the umpteenth session of the Tripartite Conference. Sardar Patel has already arrived and gone in, and when a rickshaw arrives carrying the serious-faced Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, President of the Congress, the correspondents look at their watches. It is exactly 3 p.m.

Ten minutes later, while the A.D.C.'s fidget on the red-carpeted stairs of the portico and reporters begin to wonder whether a deadlock has already been reached, there is the whirr of a car engine in first gear and an army staff car drives up carrying the Muslim League delegation—the lean and tall *Qaid-e-Azam* in lounge suit and sola hat, the chubby and rotund Nawabzada Liaqat Ali Khan, the short and prim-looking Nawab Ismail Khan, both from the U.P., and Sardar Abdul Rab Nishtar, of the Frontier.

The eight Indians are swallowed up by the cold and insensitive walls of the Viceregal palace. In one of the smaller public rooms, round a table, wait four Englishmen—the pathetic Pethick-Lawrence, bearing in his old age the burden of a century and a half of an Empire's sins and crimes; the shrewd, vegetarian lawyer Cripps, trying to balance the accounts of his past failure; A.V. Alexander, of the Admiralty, seeking postponement of the inevitable day when Britannia no longer will be able to rule the waves; and Viceroy Wavell soldier and lover of poetry, who carried on Linlithgow's policy of blood-and-iron and is still paying the price for his imperial arrogance. Those who rule by the sword, the hand cuffs and prison walls shall never know peace.....

The room where the conference is meeting is screened off from the inquisitive gaze of the journalists. And so one raises one's eyes from the partition in the verandah, pausing for a while on the windows of the bedrooms which a former Vicereine had got done up in mauve, then follows the masonry as it narrows into a cubicular pattern grimly reminiscent of the blood-stained Tower of London, and finally looks up to see the pure of the sky disfigured by the criss-cross of the Union Jack lazily, provokingly, flying in the breeze.....

The correspondents, the columnists, the news agency men, the photographers and the newsreel cameramen, representing

an aggregate of a hundred million readers and cine-goers—the eyes and ears of the world—settle down to wait, a few on rickety benches that threaten to fall apart at any moment, the rest sprawled on the lawns. Here are hard-boiled American correspondents, turned into disillusioned cynics by five years' reporting of the carnage and bloodshed of war, liberal-minded journalists from Britain trying very hard (but not always successfully to look at the Indian political scene without their imperialist spectacles; reporters from Indian nationalist newspapers, some of whom have been to jail and others to war fronts; a solitary Chinese correspondent wondering whether the tragedy of his country must be repeated in India; a smart and sleek French-woman trying to reconcile the ideals of *Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite*, with the provisions of the Defence of India Act; a diplomatic observer from the U.S.A. trying to foresee the possibilities of American trade in the event of a partition of India; the soft-spoken and affable Rajani Palme Dutt, of the British Communist Party, figuring out the position of the Indian parties in the dialectical framework of Marxism. Here is Margaret Bourke White, who has photographed the great ones of the world for *Life* and *Time* and has yet escaped becoming a soulless camera lens. Here is Betty Graham, the 'glamorous' but intelligent representative of so unglamorous and serious a journal as the socialist *New Republic*. Here is tall, sandy Archie Steele who calls himself an 'Auguster' because he covered with us the August revolt of 1942 in Bombay and has since shifted his allegiance from the *Chicago Daily News* to the *New York Herald Tribune*.....

Here are a hundred and more reporters and interpreters of news, drawn to Simla from all points of the compass, waiting for the Twelve Wise Men in that room beyond the partition—so near and yet so far—to make the news. And while they wait, and while the Twelve Wise Men wrangle over formulae, boundaries, percentages, parity and weightage, division and partition, one centre or two centres, autonomy or sovereignty.....

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A man lies dying in a dilapidated hut in an obscure village of Indore State. He is not dying of old age. He is not dying of any epidemic, though his body has been emaciate

by repeated attacks of malaria. He is not dying of wounds received in battle. He was not stabbed in a communal riot. He is not the victim of police firing or of a 'Law and Order' lathi charge. He is dying of.....STARVATION!!

Nor is he the only one. There are many like him, men and women and children in the villages of Indore State—and elsewhere in India—who are dying of starvation. So many, indeed, that their deaths have even started being reported in daily newspapers. In death they have achieved the immortality of newsprint!

Yes, this man is dying. But he is not dead yet. Even if the intestines in the caved-in stomach have stopped functioning, even if the heart within the skeleton of ribs and bones has almost become still, there is yet a flicker of life in the eyes that are unnaturally, grimly, wide open—as if he were waiting, waiting, waiting, *

The journalists and photographers have been waiting for an hour. The statisticians among them calculate the period of waiting in terms of several hundred hours, counting all the conferences and meetings, ever since that first ill-fated Cripps Mission. The way they look and feel they might have been waiting for months, for years, for eternity!

Some have gone to sleep and some are dozing, others try to drive away the tedium by chain-smoking. Steele is telling a small group about the Kuomintang-Communist negotiations he 'covered' in Chungking, negotiations that were just as protracted and tedious. But at least on the first day, he says, the correspondents were allowed to go up to the glass windows of the sound proof conference room and watch the table-thumping and the excited gestures of the rival delegates talking at one another. And someone comes forward with the theory that these political talks could be finished in half the time if the participants had to do their talking in the direct presence of correspondents. Then they would be ashamed of their futile and long-winded discussions and their irrational, unhelpful attitudes.

'My kingdom for a cup of tea!' shouts a Bombay journalist, 'I am prepared to pay a rupee in the black market for *singal cha*.'

And a dozen others suddenly remember they are acutely thirsty and start in search of a glass of water, even if they

cannot get a cup of tea. The Publicity Officers go into a huddle with staff of the Viceregal Lodge, precedents are discussed, the pros and cons debated, constitutional implications weighed, international repercussions taken into account, and finally, after fifteen minutes, two jugs of lemonade appear on the sideboard in the A.D.C.'s dining room. After an hour and a half in the sun, a glass of iced lemonade is divinely refreshing. But the jugs are soon emptied of their contents and most others have to be content with pure *aqua*. . . .

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A man in search of water! After working eight hours breaking stones and digging earth in the hot summer sun, a peasant engaged on Relief construction works in the Bijapur district wipes the sweat from his brow, picks up an empty half-canister of kerosene and starts walking out of the village. He walks across the land that lies dried up and cracked. One vast barren stretch, without even some wild berries or cactus to relieve the grim landscape. Head bowed by the day's hard labour, he walks, his eyes fixed on the earth. This once was his field, where every morning he used to arrive with his team of oxen to plough. This is where he once used to raise his crops of wheat and *bajra*. Today it lies fallow and, looking at it, one would think nothing ever would grow there again. And the Man in Search of Water finds himself suddenly filled with an indescribable feeling of sadness, for even this dried up patch of earth no longer belongs to him. Like the fields of so many other peasants it has passed on to the village *mahajan*, the usurious money-lender, to whom they are all indebted even after transferring their lands to him.

And so he walks on, across this vast waterless Sahara of hard dry land, his eyes hungering for the sight of a water-hole, his nostrils quivering for the smell of wet earth. He lets his parched tongue pass over his chapped lips. He is thirsty. He hasn't had a drop to drink since midday when he was given half a tin cup of muddy water by the contractor supervising the Relief construction works. At home, his wife is thirsty, his daughter is thirsty. His little son will never again feel thirsty because he died last week and the beloved little body went up in flames.

After walking six miles, at last, the Man in Search of Water comes to the bed of the half-dried *nallah* from where he daily carried his half-canister full of a yellowish slimy liquid that passed for water for many miles around. But even that tiny trickle is gone. Between the cruel thirsty earth and the cruel blazing sun there is now only a little wet mud left.

The Man in Search of Water looks at the earth, then he looks up at the sky and finally fixes his blank stare on the horizon—waiting, waiting, waiting for he knows not what, but still waiting. . . .

‘The whole British Empire for a cup of tea,’ the journalist from Bombay was raising his bid, and yet without success, when the conference had been in session for two hours. ‘The black market price of a *singal cha* has gone up to two rupees.

A number of new arrivals had joined in the conversation, which ranged all the way from China to Peru, but had a tendency to return every now and then to the universally popular subject of liquid refreshments. ‘Absolutely authentic and confidential’ information was being freely exchanged. Gandhiji was leaving Simla that evening. Gandhiji was planning to stay on for another six weeks. The League Working Committee members had booked their seats by the next morning’s train. An important Leaguer had said that they would not be leaving till the end of the month. Jinnah had sent a letter to Nehru. Jinnah had *not* sent a letter to Nehru. The League had agreed to one Centre. The Congress had agreed to two Centres. The Congress was insisting on immediate transfer of power. The League wanted immediate transfer of power subject to the establishment of Pakistan. The Congress wanted *this*, the League wanted *that*. No, it was the League that wanted *this* and the Congress that wanted *that* ! !.....

And so it went on till someone broached the topic of the evening’s cocktail party being given by the Information Officer of the Chamber of Princes. An American correspondent wanted to know whether some live Maharajas and Maharanis would be on view. It would be a swell party,

every one agreed, and champagne would flow like water.
 'The Indian princes are so generous...'

Precisely at that moment.....

Not more than a couple of hundred air-miles from Simla, a young man holding the national flag in his hand was being beaten up by the police. It was the 12th day of complete hartal in Faridkot State and batches of satyagrahis were being arrested and beaten up every day. This young man had been a comparatively tougher nut and wouldn't be cowed by threats, and so his skull had been duly cracked by the State police. That is how democracy and people's raj were to be ushered at least in this particular State, in keeping with the promises given by the State rulers to the Cabinet Delegation and by their Chancellor to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru!

The young man who was being beaten up, however, would not let go of the national flag that he was carrying. His clothes were torn and bloodstained, he was feeling weak from loss of blood, but he was not downhearted. Even as one lathi blow after another kept falling on his head his eyes seemed to be scanning the horizon as if he were waiting^s waiting for someone or something.....

'The whole world for a cup of tea.' The journalist from Bombay was now offering three rupees for a *singal cha* when the conference had been in session for two and a half hours. A mathematically inclined reporter was calculating how many thousand hours the talks—between Viceroy and Gandhi, Viceroy and Jinnah, Viceroy and Azad, Cripps and Gandhi, Cripps and Nehru, Cripps and Azad, Nehru and Gandhi, Azad and Gandhi, Jinnah and Nehru and all the other conversational permutations and combinations—had been going on for many months, many years, now.

At five minutes to six the leaders came out and reporters tried to interpret the expressions on their faces. One was grim, the other was smiling, the third was grim at one moment, but put on a smile as soon as he saw he was being observed by the reporters, the fourth walked away fast, the sixth strolled unhurriedly, contemplatively. . . . and so on. At last the three great minds issued their daily communique :

'The conference met again at 3 p. m. and sat until 5-45 p. m. They reviewed the progress made and adjourned until 6 p. m. tomorrow.'

Silently the journalist walked down the slope of the Viceregal Lodge. The road was steep and winding and the evening sun threw a weird pattern of shadows on the ground. Through the rich, green, aromatic foliage of tall, majestic pines one could still glimpse—far, very far away—the snow-covered peaks of the eternal Himalayas.

STOP PRESS. The starving peasant in the Indore village is still waiting to die. The Man in Search of Water is still scanning the dried-up landscape of Bijapur, and waiting. The young satyagrahi in Faridkot is still waiting for someone, something, to save him from the lathi blows of the police.

And the Twelve Wise Men are not even talking now. The conference has failed because these three—the man in search of food, the man in search of water and the man in search of freedom—were not allowed to cross the threshold of the conference room.

WHEN FREEDOM COMES ...

—May 25

*Is this the way the world [of Imperialism] ends—
Not with a bang but a whimper?*

Transported, at a few hours' notice and by special train carrying press correspondents and political leaders including Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, from the cool heights of Simla to the heat and the dust-storms of New Delhi, I have been asking myself this question ever since that historic 5000-word document was handed to the hundred odd assembled journalists by the Secretary of State for India.

I have read the full text of the statement issued in the name of the Cabinet Delegation and the Viceroy with the care that it deserved. I have duly—and gratefully—noted that it speaks of the 'Indian PEOPLE' and not the 'Indian PEOPLES', a phrase which Sir Stafford Cripps was fond of using during

the ill-fated negotiations that he carried on single-handed in 1942. (An 'S', more or less, may be a small matter, but it could make all the difference between success and failure in political negotiations. Perhaps Sir Stafford might have succeeded in his 1942 Mission if only he had omitted the unnecessary 'S'.....) It is a relief to find that the Mission has rejected the Pakistan of Mr Jinnah's conception, though it is obvious that the Three Groups Scheme (which, it seems, the provinces are free to join but *not free not to join!*) is quite a substantial substitute offered to appease the League Fuehrer. Wading through the 'Whereases' and the 'wherebys', I have tried to digest the statistics and the tables and the charts and the clauses and the sub-clauses and, after unsuccessfully consulting seven dictionaries, got a rough idea of that brand new phrase—'opt out'. I have even followed Mahatma Gandhi's advice and read the text of the statement translated in all the various Indian languages that I know.

But there is one vital phrase which I have failed to find anywhere in the 5,000 words of the statement: FROM NOW ON INDIA IS COMPLETELY, UN-CONDITIONALLY FREE. Surely, it could not have been left out for brevity's sake!

Most of us had, of course, no clear-cut notion of the precise form the advent of independence would take, but one did expect something exciting to happen to change the entire mood of four hundred million people, to make them walk erect with new-found dignity and pride, their heart-beats singing the happy refrain: WE ARE FREE! WE ARE FREE!! Only the most moderate among the Moderates could have foreseen or forecast things to come in the shape of a five-thousand word statement of which hardly half a dozen words are devoted to the exciting theme of freedom.

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Does this Statement, as clarified by the Secretary of State at his press conference and by the Viceroy in his broadcast, spell FREEDOM for India? Or is it one more postponement of the vital issue? Or is it a device to offer Freedom and then to hedge it round with such conditions as make the functioning of that Freedom impossible? Or, with all its imperfections, does it really open out before us the

vista of independence? These questions should be, and no doubt will be, answered by our national leaders. The 'Chronicler' is no political analyst, but only a recorder of the moods—the hopes and the fears, the aspirations and the exasperations—of the common people. All I know and can say is that as the journalists trooped out of the Assembly Chamber with the Secretary of State's statement in their hands, the Union Jack was still flying over the Viceregal Lodge. Next day, when the people read of the statement in their daily papers their faces did not suddenly light up with hope, their minds were still worried by food shortage, cloth scarcity, unemployment and lack of housing accommodation.

And as in Calcutta three years earlier, Hunger stalked the streets of Delhi and New Delhi in the form of dark-bodied destitutes from the south with hands stretched out for charity and a mute question-mark in their sunken lifeless eyes: 'Will Freedom be too late for us, as it was for several millions of our brothers and sisters in Bengal?'

Whether it is Freedom, near-Freedom or pseudo-Freedom, I am afraid history will record that the last act of the Indo-British drama was marked by a singular lack of grace and dignity on all sides. Our own leaders' naive faith in British sincerity, after numerous disillusionments during the last thirty years, is as exasperating as the pious and patronizing airs of the Cabinet Delegation. It is typical of Britain's imperialist hypocrisy that when she is forced by the impact of history and the determination of a people to be free to relax her stranglehold, she pretends that she has all along been a votary of freedom and equality!

Perhaps I am being fussy and politically naive to expect such a bald statement to announce the transfer of power to Indian hands. It may be pointed out that at the very beginning, the Statement quotes the words of Premier Attlee wherein he promised that the members of the Mission were going to India 'with the intention of using their utmost endeavour to help her to attain her freedom as speedily and as fully as possible'. Again, the Statement closes with 'the hope that the new independent India' might choose to remain within the British Commonwealth of Nations. The Commander-in-Chief has graciously announced his willingness

to work '*Hindustani War Member sahib kay neechay*' as he put it in his Hindustani broadcast to his *jawans*! Shouldn't all this, coupled with the promise of an interim Government to be immediately formed and the Constituent Assembly (at last the phrase popularized by the Congress has been accepted) to be convened soon, add up to a Declaration of Independence?

Perhaps it should. Perhaps it does! And yet, one has always thought and dreamt of Freedom being ushered in a more dramatic, more exciting, more spectacular, and more decisive manner.

I am sure many of us had some favourite vision of the advent of Indian Independence. Some, no doubt, imagined and were prepared to reach the national goal through a bloody revolution. Others perhaps thought in terms of a mammoth and spectacular country-wide General Strike forcing the foreign Bureaucracy to abdicate in favour of a Government of the people of this country. If some favoured a sudden *coup d'état* in the tradition of European revolutions, others anticipated with excitement an Indian version of the storming of the Bastille and a revolutionary army (violent or non-violent) marching up to the Viceregal Lodge in New Delhi, hauling down the Union Jack from its ramparts and replacing it with the national tri-colour. It might have been a little fantastic to imagine a symbolical departure of all the British officials by the S. S. VICEROY OF INDIA, in literal compliance with the QUIT INDIA resolution of August, 1942, but at least one had the right to expect the 'dethronement' of the Viceroy, the Commander-in-Chief and other high British officials who, either personally or through their minions, have been responsible for the repression and misery of the people of this country.

I am amused when I read that British and American newspapers are gloating over the phenomenon of a great Empire voluntarily liquidating itself. For we in India know what is making Britain quit India—or at least make a show of it. Thousands have had to die, millions have had to suffer imprisonment and torture and beatings and loss of property to bring home to imperialist Britain the fact that her presence in India is

repugnant in the extreme to India's four hundred millions. The road to freedom was not paved by Britain's good intentions but by the blood and bones of countless patriotic martyrs. If any gratitude is due it is to them and their glorious memory.

If it is the hour of rank opportunism for Britain, it is no moment of glory for India, either. If Britain has lacked in grace in conceding our freedom, we have lacked in dignity in taking it away from them. After fifty years of increasingly bitter anti-imperialist struggle, surely it was not befitting our national honour to accept our adversary as the arbiter of our destiny and the patronizing mediator in our internal differences.

For me the hour of humiliation was 8 p. m. on Sunday, May 12, in the lounge of the Cecil Hotel, Simla. A group of Indian and foreign correspondents were waiting for a telephone call from the Viceregal Lodge where the Tripartite Conference was holding, what turned out to be, its last session. There was a melancholy sickbed—or rather, death-bed—atmosphere, as every one knew the Conference was bound to fail. The desultory talk was carried on in mock-medical terms. The patient is sinking, Penicillin treatment is being started, Artificial Respiration has been resorted to, Oxygen cylinders have been ordered, etc.

Then the telephone bell rang and every one rushed to the Receptionist's desk. It was one of the reporters phoning from the Viceregal Lodge. In brief, staccato, unemotional sentences he gave the news we had all been expecting. The patient had finally given up the ghost. The Congress and League leaders had failed to reach agreement. The Conference had ended! There would be a press conference immediately, when Mr Joyce, the Delegation's Press Officer, would read out the official statement.

Everyone rushed out towards the Labour Department building where the press conference was to be held. I lingered for a moment, to wait for a friend who was making a trunk call to his office to catch the Dak edition, when I happened to look at a British journalist, representative of a Conservative journal, who was lighting his pipe before leaving for the press conference. He saw me and smiled. It was not a friendly smile though, there was a patronizing

kind of pity in it. In effect it said, 'You poor mugs, you Indians, so you think you can make us quit India, do you?'

I was to see the same smile, this time deeper and more pronounced, fifteen minutes later, when Joyce was reading out the statement that has now become a part of history: 'The British Cabinet Delegation and H. E. the Viceroy, while greatly regretting that the discussions have not led to any agreed plan between the leaders of the Congress and the Muslim League.....' For a moment his voice was drowned in the roar of a crowd passing on the road just outside the window, shouting: '*Lay kay rahengay Pakistan.....But kay rahega Hindustan!*' Joyce paused in his reading of the statement and it seemed he didn't mind it, as if those slogans, too, were a part of his statement. The voices of the crowd were excited, charged with anger and bitterness. But hardly had they receded and the reading of the statement been resumed by Joyce when there was another crowd passing along the same road, also shouting slogans. But these slogans were different. For me they were good slogans: '*Hindustan ek hai..... Hindustan ek rahega*'. But when I caught the eye of that same British correspondent and saw him smiling that mocking, triumphant smile, I wished they had not raised those slogans at that time, at that spot!

Forty-eight hours later the experience was repeated on the platform of Kalka station just as the special train carrying correspondents and some Congress and League leaders was steaming out. There was a crowd carrying green flags shouting pro-Pakistan slogans and a few paces away, another one shouting anti-imperialist, anti-Pakistan slogans. There was an open competition between the two as to who could out-shout the other, and the Guard's repeated whistle was drowned in the flood of slogans. The train started, stopped, then started, then stopped again. Journalists came out of their compartments to 'watch the fun'. I saw that same correspondent strolling towards my compartment. Something told me there would be the same smile on his face, and I knew I shouldn't be able to stand it this third time. So, like a coward, I put down the shutters, bolted the door and switched off the light.

When shall I be able to meet that correspondent's smile with a triumphant smile of my own?

REVOLT IN HEAVEN

—June 2

One day before the Tripartite Conference broke down, all the journalists present in Simla were invited to a cocktail party at one of the swanky hotels by the Principal Information Officer of the Chamber of Princes. We all, or most of us, went there—some to have free liquor at the expense of Their Highnesses, some out of curiosity, to have a look at a couple of live Princes who were to be present, some out of sheer boredom, because there was nothing else to do on that dull evening.

The cocktail bar was overcrowded and there was much talk and much pointless laughter and much cigarette smoke and much explosive popping of champagne bottles. American and British correspondents were taken to one side and introduced to the Chancellor of the Chamber of Princes, the Nawab of Bhopal, who had forgotten to wear his state jewels and so looked very much like a human being without even that halo of divine right of kings which is supposed to decorate all princely heads. Meanwhile, the third assistant of the Principal Information Officer of the Chamber of Princes carried on polite conversation with minor orange-squash-drinking journalists, and without much circumspection, asked them to be good enough to publish the communiques issued by the Information Office of the Chamber of Princes to present the 'States' point-of-view' before the public. To which one of the correspondents who did not feel that the Princes had bought his soul with half a dozen glasses of champagne, retorted. 'You are welcome to send us your communiques and I promise you they will be used—against the interests of your masters, the Princes'! Which was taken as a helluva joke in that sophisticated and slightly tipsy company—but wasn't!

I am glad I went to that cocktail party for, in retrospect, it seems to have been a historic occasion—the last flicker of the lamp of the princely order. History has recorded that on the eve of the French revolution, too, 'there was a royal fete at Versailles, there was dancing and singing before the King.

and Queen, and toasts were drunk'—in champagne, of course,.....

History does repeat itself, and what has been shall be. The story of France is being repeated in Kashmir, but it is only the events of long ago and far away that acquire the impressive aura of history. The revolutionary upsurge of our own people before our own eyes is often dismissed as a riot, a mutiny, a disturbance, an insurrection, a case of mob violence.....

It is not without significance that Kashmir should be the first state to raise the standard of open revolt, to issue QUIT orders to its ruler in the same decisive manner as the QUIT INDIA resolution of August 8, 1942, to carry the implications of the democratic struggle of the Indian people for freedom to their logical conclusion. For, if it is hunger and oppression that breed revolution, Kashmir has been more than ripe for it for many years. This valley of joy, this heaven upon earth, is the home of the world's poorest and most down-trodden human beings; many of them exist on an economic level not much higher than that of animals.

Even the most casual tourist to Kashmir cannot remain oblivious to the misery of the Kashmiris. It is a grim irony, but perfectly symbolic of the system of feudal exploitation, that the inhabitants of this world-famed health resort should be stoop-shouldered, sore-eyed, sunken-cheeked, that the historically famous craftsmen who produce exquisite woollens should shiver in rags in the cold of a frost-bitten winter; that the manufacturers of luxurious carpets and beautifully carved woodwork shouldn't have a stick of furniture in their homes; that growers of millions of tons of luscious fruits should starve for a morsel of food.

Four times have I been to Kashmir, travelling from end to end of the State, trekking to the remotest interior, far from the beaten track. And the more I have seen the beauties of its hills and its valleys, its gardens and its orchards, its lakes and its rivers, and marvelled at them, the more appalled have I been at the unspeakable poverty of its people, condemned to live in squalor and ignorance, while their ruler wastes millions in breeding horses for the Mahalaxmi race-course,

building palaces in Bombay and New Delhi, and spreading the fame of 'Mr A' in the gay capitals of Europe.

When as a schoolboy I went to Kashmir for the first time I was only vaguely disturbed by this glaring contrast between the beauty of nature and the ugliness of man.

When I went there again after some years I was indignant at the servile, cow-like patience with which the masses of Kashmir endured this life of horrors without protest. 'WHY DON'T THEY REVOLT?' I kept asking myself.

On my third visit I sensed new life stirring under the earth, I heard the rumbles of protest. The middle-class intelligentsia had awakened but, as it happens often with this class, their movement had assumed an unnecessarily communal character.

But when I went there last and attended a session of the Kashmir National Conference, and saw the procession of Kashmiri workers and peasants and craftsmen parading the streets of Srinagar, and heard their slogans and heard their songs, and saw the gleam of hope in their eyes as they listened to their dynamic leader, Shaikh Mohamed Abdullah, I knew that Kashmir, at last, was awake and striding along the road to freedom. And when I read the Socialist, non-denominational programme popularized by the National Conference under the significant and inspiring title of *New Kashmir*, I knew that here was a movement of the people, rising out of the basic economic needs and demands of the people, and that never again would it be side-tracked into futile communal channels.

Then I went for a trip into the interior, on foot and horseback, across frozen mountain passes and into forgotten, enchanted valleys. And wherever I went, in the huts of rice farmers on the slopes of the hills, and in water-mills by the side of gurgling streams, and around the camp-fires of the nomadic shepherds, I was amazed to hear the echoes of what I had heard Shaikh Abdullah speak in Srinagar. NEW KASHMIR—this two-word *mantra* had roused a whole people and fired their imagination with the vision of a future without poverty and without exploitation, when this land of theirs would indeed become a heaven on earth. Nor had this been achieved by a miracle. It was the result of Shaikh Abdullah's having tramped through his land and met his

people in their humble huts and tents and sat with them and talked to them in their own language about the things that were vital to them. And even as he had left with them the impress of his personality, the spark of his vision and the echo of his voice, so had he taken with him a newer, firmer faith born out of the faith of his people.

And a vision came to me, a vision of this NEW KASHMIR—of smiling faces amidst the glowing saffron fields, of men and women who walked erect like the cypresses or the lofty deodars, of bright-eyed children laughing on their way to school, of craftsmen bent over their exquisite embroideries and carvings, of sturdy farmers working with zest in their fields, of organized skilled workers in state-owned factories, of scientists harnessing the elements in the service of their people by damming the rivers and building hydro-electric plants and digging for minerals.....

But I knew that before this goal was reached, the traditions of ignorance and servility of centuries would have to be blasted, a new democratic, revolutionary spirit infused among the people. Revolution is a painful process and the birth-pangs are notoriously unpleasant. What is happening in Kashmir today—the arrest of the people's leaders, the police repression, the retaliatory violence of the people—is the agony of fruitful creation.

FROM PALME DUTT TO PEPITA

—June 9

'Oh, my deah, do you think this shade of my red sari is correct for Palme Dutt's lecturer?'

'It will do, Fifi. But your hair-do is all wrong for a Communist meeting. Don't you know the parting should be on the left—and without any deviation?'

Go to the A.-I.C.C. meeting or the first night of an Uday Shankar show, a Menaka recital or a reception to Jaiprakash Narain, the opening of the Art Exhibition or

Gandhiji's prayer meeting, a Red Cross Ball at the Taj or a National Theatre show in aid of the I.N.A., a Carmen Miranda picture at the Metro or a People's Theatre play in Parel, the Three Arts Circle or Progressive Group, Verrier Elwin's lecture at the Silverfish or a Cricket Club tea dance, you are sure to find the same sharkskin suits and the same gold-border saris occupying the Front Seats.

They were there also at Rajni Palme Dutt's lecture at Sunderbai Hall last week to listen to the British Communist leader pronounce the doom of the social and economic order which they so glaringly represent. They had paid five rupees per seat to be able to exhibit themselves and their clothes in this gathering of Reds, near-Reds and pseudo-Reds, and to enjoy the 'thrilling' spectacle of so unusual a 'performer' as a real, live Communist. 'But he looks so sweet, my deah, in his light-blue shirt. And I am quite sure he didn't have a bomb in his pocket like those bearded Bo'shies of olden days.'

I like Palme Dutt both as a human being and as a political speaker—without necessarily agreeing with everything he may say. He is too seasoned a Communist to be a fanatic like some of the new converts; he is also a real intellectual, and so he doesn't have to show off his Marxist vocabulary of 'left deviation', 'dialectical materialism', 'the historical role of the working class', 'dictatorship of the proletariat' etc. He can talk pleasantly to Congressmen, Leaguers, cynical journalists and sophisticated socialites without causing or taking offence. He can also don a reasonably well-tailored blue serge suit and go to a cocktail party given by the Princes' Chamber without compromising his stand against feudalism and autocracy, and without fearing what 'Peesee' might say if he heard that he had taken a glass of champagne.....

As a public speaker, Dutt has the advantage of a good stage presence. Tall, lean, gaunt, a deeply lined hatchet face, a voice that is perfectly in control and can cover the whole range from a stage whisper to passionate peroration; and above all, a sharp, incisive mind trained for analysis and lucid exposition.

He has a sense of humour, too, not very pronounced, but sufficiently developed to save his speech from that

'Six First Class to Bandra,' one of them shouts through the grill of the booking office.

The booking clerk, who has been on duty for eight long hours, is a little slow in making out the tickets. The *Sahib* is impatient. 'Come on, look sharp, you sonovabitch.' The young clerk—he is hardly twenty-one—knows he has been abused, but they didn't teach him such slangy abbreviations at school. At any rate he knows he can't answer back. The *Sahib* is always right! So he hands over the tickets and the change and, as the gay crowd disappears round the corner, he heaves a sigh, straightens his back, starts counting the cash which he will have to turn over. Ten—twenty—thirty—hundred—hundred and fifty—two hundred—three hundred—three hundred and forty-seven. Three hundred and forty-seven from one single window in one shift. And he imagines hundreds of clerks like him counting money—hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands, lakhs, millions! But out of this he will get only thirty rupees at the end of the month. One rupee per day. Less than what the porters earn, less than a mill-worker, less than a municipal sweeper. And yet he is a matriculate and, if only his father could afford it, he would have liked to go to college. The train whistle, sounding eerily as it disappears into the distance, is like the echo of his own sad sigh.

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In the blazing June sun the gangman walks along the permanent way, five miles up, five miles down, tapping the joints with his steel hammer, testing the bolts and screws that keep the rails tightly joined to one another. It is hard work but he likes it. He knows it is important. One loose joint can send the train hurtling down the embankment at that hair-pin bend yonder, and cause the death of hundreds. He does his work efficiently, conscientiously, with mechanical precision learnt in fourteen years of tramping up and down the permanent way on this same line. It gives him satisfaction to know that he is doing a useful job. It gives him a sense of power.

But today he is a little absent-minded and not in a mood to talk and joke with other members of the gang. There is something on his mind as he walks along silently, tapping at the rails mechanically, without thought, without conscious

effort. Today, back at home in the little hut assembled together with scrap iron and discarded wooden sleepers, his wife lies on some rags spread on the floor, alone, facing the crisis of childbirth. Today—after years of patient waiting—he may become the father of a child—may be a boy! A boy who, after him, may also become an efficient gangman.

He wishes he were with her now to give her some comfort in these moments of pain, but they wouldn't give him leave. Gangmen have no leave privileges. Absence from work, even for a single day, means loss of his daily wage, might even mean loss of his job.

Five miles up, five miles down! And when he returns home, his heart beating wildly with hope, he is greeted with a grim, ominous silence. He had fondly expected to hear the howling of his new-born, but he doesn't hear even the heavy breathing of his wife. As he opens the door he finds her—dead! By her side lies a little bundle of flesh—also dead! Gangmen can't afford doctors and nurses, not even midwives.

Absent-mindedly he loosens the fingers of his closed fist and lets fall a little shower of rupee notes and change—twenty-two rupees and eight annas, the wages for his 25-day month. Then he looks at the dead child and a grim smile breaks the tense muscles of his face. Thank God, he mutters, thank God they won't get another gangman—on twenty-two rupees and eight annas a month!

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The boy of twelve has only a shirt on his back and the rain comes down in torrents. It is night and he is alone. He is shivering with cold and with fear. If only it were not so dark.....

Every now and then there is a flash of lightning and the boy can see the railway lines for miles, stretching away into the distance. Somewhere along this line, at a distance of half a mile from each other, are other men—railway workers like him or just simple villagers routed out of their huts on this stormy night to guard the line for the safe passage of the Viceregal Special.

The boy is only twelve, but he is no fool. He is an apprentice in the engine shed at a small junction station and is already beginning to learn the rudiments of his job. One Up. Two Down. Shunting. Goods. Passenger, Shuttle, Express

Mail. He knows them all. But this Viceregal Special is a new one he has never seen before. He wonders why this train alone needs protection, and no other train. And he wonders whether the eight rupees and eight annas that he is paid every month includes compensation for this kind of extra work, too. But then he remembers that the Viceroy is the big *laal sahib*, a super-king over all the *chhota laals* and the *rajas* and the *nawabs* and the D.T.S. *sahibs*. Surely such a great one wouldn't pass by without throwing a rupee—may be, even a gold mohur—for the little boy who has stood so bravely in the rain to protect the life of the big *laal sahib*.

Over the sound and fury of the storm comes the piercing cry of the engine whistle, as the train comes thundering nearer and nearer. The boy's heart throbs with expectation of a large *bukhshish*. But, like a streak of lightning, the train flashes past through the storm—with all its windows and doors shut tight, and the big *laal sahib* asleep somewhere in a cosy compartment, oblivious of the presence of a boy of twelve who is catching his death of pneumonia, standing guard in the rain to ensure the life of the great but ungrateful super-king.....

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The First Class Air-Conditioned coupe is a pleasant, self-contained, self-sufficient world, as the Frontier Mail steams out of the Central Station. There is a soft and springy berth. A bed-light to read by before sleeping. There is a shower in the bath room. On the sideboard are a bottle of Scotch whisky, a bottle of gin, a bottle of lime juice, three bottles of beer; half a dozen soda-water bottles are in the ice box, and there are no fewer than three thermos flasks if one is in a mood for nothing better than iced water. At hand is a Peter Cheyney detective thriller, a copy of the *Strand* and the latest edition of a safe daily newspaper like *The Times of India*.....

But in the paper, as one idly glances through it, is disturbing news. A million workers on the different railway lines have given notice of a strike. Station masters and guards, clerks and coolies, engine-drivers and stokers, gangmen and sweepers—all of them are in this unholy conspiracy to deprive law-abiding, respectable citizens of their Fifth Freedom, To Travel By Air-conditioned First Class!

It is amazing how these ungrateful wretches can be so blind to their own interests as to go on a strike. Don't they know that as railway workers they have privileges which are denied to many others—free travel, free uniform, special ration shops? What else do they want? Viceroy's pay and Air-Conditioned travel? They have the guts to threaten the mighty railway administration—these guttersnipes whom you see there standing in front of the chawls that the B. B. & C. I. Railway has so generously provided for them! Look at their filthy unwashed children.....But what's that? Begad, Sir, one of them is actually waving his fist threateningly at the Frontier Mail.....

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I have been to those chawls that flank the B. B. & C. I. main line beyond Parel. And I have seldom seen darker, dirtier, more unhygienic dwellings for human beings anywhere else in the world. Here they live, the gangmen and the sweepers, the riveters and the workshop mechanics, in chawls surrounded by stagnant, malaria-breeding pools of slimy water. Here they live, an average family of five or six sharing a room seven-foot-by-seven-foot. Here these sturdy sons of the soil, from the open fields of Maharashtra and the rolling plains of the Punjab, from the villages on the banks of the Ganges and the pine-covered hills of Kumaon, are condemned to live in miserable hovels which would be condemned as unfit for the accommodation of pigs in any civilized country under a civilized Government. I saw women cooking in verandahs in front of their rooms, as the monsoon showers were blown in by the breeze, soaking them to the skin, often putting out the fire in their hearths. I saw a whole chawl (housing forty families) sharing but two water taps. I saw a row of ninety-six rooms, each housing one family, which were provided with only two primitive and filthy lavatories.

This is how the railway administration treats its workers in one of the greatest and most advanced metropolises of the world.

But, strange as it might seem, I did not come back depressed after spending a day going round these chawls. For I sensed in them, amidst all this squalor and filth and near-destitution, the throb of a new life. The worker, transplanted from his mortgaged fields in the country to these city

slums, has yet not lost all his innate sensitiveness to beauty. He still has a dignity of his own. And, in the new comradeship of his class organizations, he is finding new strength and new hope.

I went into the rooms of a chawl inhabited by Harijan workers and was agreeably surprised to find each room kept reasonably clean, much cleaner than any other working class dwellings that I have seen anywhere else in Bombay. Not only were the rooms kept clean but, in a small and sometimes pathetically naive way, well-furnished, too. A cake of soap, a towel, an electric torch hanging on the wall, paper flowers arranged in a broken bottle, pictures cut-out from papers and pasted on the wall, a heavy second-hand four-poster bedstead bought at an auction and somehow squeezed into the room, a table, a chair, dogeared Hindi books, an umbrella, a broken-down time-piece, brass name-plates on the doors—everywhere there were signs of this sub-conscious but painstaking striving towards a newer, better life. When a friend accompanying me remarked on the comparatively well-arranged rooms, I could see the faces of these humble Harijans, regarded as untouchables even by their fellow-workers from the upper castes, shine with pride and joy. Here, by their own effort and their own organization—they ran a sort of night school for boys who couldn't go to the municipal school—they were climbing out of the filth and ignorance in which centuries of social oppression had kept them. Hence was the problem of untouchability solving itself.

I went into some chawls where the workers had organized their gymnasiums, where they bought copies of Hindi or Marathi newspapers and collectively read them in the evenings, where they had their own brass band with which they proudly and noisily went to Labour rallies and meetings.

I went into these same seven-foot-by-seven hovels and found potted plants hanging in the windows and the balconies, pets like parrots kept in home-made cages to amuse the children, and where possible (in case of ground floor residents) little plots of land planted with vegetables, herbs and even flowers.

I saw on the walls of these very dark and dingy rooms photographs of national leaders cheek by jowl with those of film stars. In one room I saw all the walls and doors and windows beautifully painted with colourful and naively artistic patterns—the work of some proletarian painter.

Wherever we went in this colony of railway workers the talk was of the strike. The Strike. *Our* Strike! They talked of it with a proprietorial air, as if it was their precious possession, the means of their salvation, their weapon of offence and defence against the forces of injustice. One of them preferred to call it *andolan* (struggle) and whatever grievance of the workers was mentioned—the scarcity of water taps or compensation for injuries in railway accidents—he would say that nothing would be done without an *andolan*.

And hearing them talk, and looking at their grimly defiant faces, I could see how and why these poor, ignorant, oppressed workers had given proof of such remarkable political consciousness and solidarity by voting in their union ballots, almost unanimously, for the Strike. I knew then that this strike was not some manoeuvre of the trade union leadership, as Sir Edward Benthall would have us believe, but that it was the collective and grimly desperate resolve of these grimy stokers and sweepers and gangmen and signalmen. And I knew that against their collective strength not all the Governmental might that all the Benthalls might summon would be of any avail. It is of the essence of the new time spirit, which some call socialism and others the rising consciousness of the masses, that the workers must win and the Bosses and the Benthalls must lose.

‘ I REMEMBER—I REMEMBER ’

—August 4

I like you—do you like me ?

The singer at the mike, a pale and skinny Anglo-Indian girl with a not unpleasant voice and rather wistful expression, kept on repeating the refrain of the song like a desperate litany, almost like a wail.

I like you—do you like me ?—over and over and over again.

Then she went back to her seat and the band that had been, as it were, kept in leash by the power of her voice now broke loose like an untamed horse.

The music had come from all over the world and been syncopated into this wild and sensuous rhythm. There were waltz tunes from sophisticated old Vienna, the Vienna that died under Hitler's jackboot and shall be no more. There were hot jazzy tunes from America, musical expressions of a dynamic but confused culture. There were tunes from down Argentine way and tunes from the tropical paradise of Hawaii. In this strange medley of music, rhumbo rubbed shoulders with waltz, and Schubert found himself in the company of Xavier Cugat and Harry James. Here the wail of the violin and the blare of the saxophone were superimposed on the beating of a barbaric tom-tom calling the men and women of some cannibalistic tribe to a dance round a fire on which a human is being roasted.....

The men and women dance the tribal dance in an orgy of sensuous excitement, their eyes gleaming and their hips swaying. But they no longer paint their bodies—only their faces; and they wear lounge suits and Bird-of-Paradise saris, instead of feathers and leaves and grass.

And, around and above them, rise the heady fumes of whisky and brandy and beer and gin and port and sherry, for Bottle is king in this carnival of sensuous futility.

This is Mussoorie, queen of hill stations, the Paris-and-Monte-Carlo-and-Coney-Island of the East, and it is the hour before lunch. But the slippery, polished dance floors in the hotels and restaurants and night clubs are already crowded. For dancing begins early in Mussoorie and goes on up to the small hours of the next morning when the pleasure-seekers retire to their bungalows and hotel rooms to sleep for a few hours and regain their energy for another dancing session...

This is Mussoorie, the dancers' paradise and there are a dozen places offering Lunch Hour Dances, Tea Dances, Cocktail Dances, Long Cocktail Dances, Dinner Dances, Supper Dances, Lucky Nights, Crazy Nights, Cabarets, Revues, Fancy Dress Balls, A Night In Spain, A Night In Hawaji (no, there is no 'Night In India').....There are any number of entertainers—Madame Era d'Alba, 'the reputed Opera singer', Edna Belle Fontaine (no relation of Joan!), the

'exquisite solo dancer', Greta, the glamorous contortionist, Tony Falleiro, and his orchestra, Pete Mendoza and *his* Orchestra, to mention only a few. And, of course, there is Benny, the Boogie Woogie Man.....

This is Mussoorie where it is a social sin not to be gay and to enjoy yourself. If you can't dance, just cling to your partner and walk round the dance floor, stepping on her toes; if you do not feel like smiling, just wear a smile like a mask... ..Eat, drink and pretend to be merry, for tomorrow you may be dead and gone from Mussoorie. In this country of your birth you are never really young, and middle-aged only once, and old age comes creeping along, like an army of shadows, steadily advancing day and night, night and day....

*Day and night, night and day
I think of you.*

The lonely man at the corner table looked at the girl-at-the-mike and wondered if she meant it, and knew that she didn't. She was singing this to earn a living—and wearing a forced smile! And, somehow, looking at her, the lonely man felt lonelier. This was his fourteenth season in Mussoorie—he had been coming here every year, since he had passed out of the Colvin Taluqdars' School and started wearing long pants—but he had never felt like this before. Why was he feeling unhappy?—he wondered as he drained his fifth bottle of beer and ordered another. He was rich, had a large estate which yielded nearly a lakh per year, he divided his days between Mussoorie in summer and Lucknow and Calcutta in winter. He had two wives at home and he got a mistress wherever he went. Girls had never been difficult to obtain. You paid and got the best in the market! He had a fleet of sleek, high-powered cars. His wardrobe was well-stocked and came from the best tailors in the country. He had any number of smart and fashionable friends with whom he could play Bridge, Roulette or Billiards. He had no worries on account of his estate. His manager looked after his affairs, he never had even to go there except when the Governor or Commissioner came for a visit or a shoot. He had no debts, no complications in his affairs of the heart, he was in the best of health, the climate of Mussoorie was bracing..... .. Why, then, did he feel depressed and lonely

in the midst of all this gay and vivacious crowd? Why did he have this premonition of disaster? Why?

And, as a possible explanation, the quite irrelevant thought occurred to him that very few of his taluqdar friends had come to Mussoorie this season, and that the few that had come had gone back after spending only a few weeks. It was they who always constituted the life and soul of Gay Mussoorie, it was they who had made it the glamorous rendezvous of the lords and the ladies of the land. But why had they abandoned Mussoorie so early this year? Where were they, anyway.....?

Most of the taluqdars and landed gentry of the U.P. whom their fellow-aristocrat was searching for in Mussoorie at that moment, were crowded in the visitors' galleries of the Legislative Assembly chamber in Lucknow, gloomily listening to History pronouncing the doom of their class.

It is significant that, of all the provinces with Congress ministries in power, the United Provinces should have been the first to implement the promise about the abolition of zamindari contained in the Congress election manifesto. For the U.P. is the home of the richest, most powerful and most influential landlords. It is also the home of perhaps the poorest and most down-trodden peasantry in India. And the traditional pageantry, the lavish hospitality and the colourful culture for which the taluqdars of Oudh are famous have all been by-products of a system mainly responsible for the misery of millions of tillers of the soil. Again, and inevitably, it was in this province that the seeds of the class struggle were first sown. It was in Cawnpore that the Communist Party of India was born, it was in Meerut that the Government staged its famous Conspiracy Case. It was in the U.P. that the biggest No-Rent campaign was launched by the peasantry under the leadership of Congress leaders like Nehru, in 1934. It is from the U.P. that the Congress Socialist Party receives its principal strength, and it is in this province, along with Bihar, that the Kisan movement first developed and is best organized and most militant.

The United Provinces of Agra and Oudh is spread over one of the most fertile areas in India. How fertile and rich it is I had occasion to observe as, on my way from Delhi to Mussoorie by bus, I passed through the sugarcane plantations of the Meerut

division, the water-logged paddy fields around Saharanpur and the vast, thick growth of the Doon forest. It is a shame and a crime that those who till this land should live in such poverty, destitution and squalor as I have seen nowhere outside the villages of the U.P. and Bengal. The U.P. peasant has been crushingly burdened with the zamindars, who, beginning as rent-collectors under Moghul rule, were invested with virtual ownership of land under the British who were naturally anxious to create a class of parasites who would be dependent for their very existence on the imperial power and, therefore, would serve as a bulwark against the rising tide of revolutionary nationalism. The zamindars, like their elder brothers, the Princes, have served imperialism well and their loud protestations of loyalty to the British Raj are on record. Their liquidation is not merely a measure of drastic and long over-due economic readjustment, but, perhaps, the final and most decisive blow to the structure of imperialism in India.

It was a historic moment, therefore, when Minister Rafi Ahmed Kidwai stood up in the U.P. Assembly to propose that the legislature accept the principle of the abolition of zamindari, one of the rare instances of a basic social and economic change being accomplished without a bloody revolution.

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The day had turned to night and the dance floor was so overcrowded that the pairs could hardly move in the crush. The musicians and some of the dancers had changed into evening jackets and some of the women had returned with more rouge on their cheeks and bigger gold-borders to their saris. The hall was a splash of colour like a rainbow. One could see red-and-green saris looking like flags, crimson saris looking like banners of revolt, printed saris looking like flower gardens, saris with borders ten inches broad, silk saris and georgette saris, saris that were blue like the deep-blue sea and saris that were green like an emerald turf, saris and *shalwars* and *ghararas* and slacks and sweaters. This was the strange new democracy of the dance floor, the high and the low equalized by the common denominator of sex.

Here was a minor rajah dancing with a sales girl, a plump Society lady in the arms of a British N.C.O., a short,

bearded Sikh dancing with a tall white blonde, a lean journalist pushing around an enormously fat old Englishwoman like a motor launch towing a battleship. Here were prostitutes looking like minor princesses, a grey-haired matron swaying her non-existent hips to tango rhythm, a bald old man of sixty or above pathetically clinging to an Anglo-Indian stenographer in her twenties. Here were Punjabi landlords, Sikh contractors, black-marketeers from Bombay—and a few representatives of the U.P. aristocracy, drinking, and dancing, dancing and drinking, as if desperately trying to catch these moments of pleasure before the stroke of doom annihilated their class and its ill-gotten privileges. . . .

I remember—I remember. . . .

The girl-at-the-mike is singing in a voice now hoarse with the strain of a whole day and half a night of crooning to order.

I remember—I remember. . . .

In the noise and the laughter and the popping of champagne bottles and the blaring of the band, her voice is lost and no one knows what she remembers.

But to the unhappy aristocrat in a corner, it seems as if she is mocking him. For, soon, memories will be all that will be left to him and his class.

I remember—I remember. . . .

MUSSOORIE

10,000 FEET ABOVE REALITY

—August 11

It was ten years ago, I think, that I (pardon my cough!) inaugurated the first Air Mail Service in India—at least I was a passenger in the tiny, four-seater plane that flew from Bombay to Delhi, and next day flew back, carrying several thousand letters bearing the special commemoration stamps which, I believe, must already be rated pretty high in philatelists' catalogues.

For one hardly out of the cub reporter stage, it was quite an exciting assignment. Aeroplane flights in those days, at least in India, were associated with crashes and disasters and—the memory of R101 and other similar aerial tragedies being fresh in the public memory—insurance companies still looked askance at a proposal on behalf of any one who adopted flying as a career. One was almost expected to draw up his will before going up in a plane.

Yes, my heart beat quite fast as I squeezed myself into that little machine—the only passenger beside no less distinguished a pilot than J. R. D. Tata then the head of Tata Airlines, and today 'Boss' of the entire Tata outfit! And, such are the absurd lengths to which a journalist's craze for NEWS will go, that I caught myself hoping the plane *would* have a crash—at least a minor accident or forced landing—so that I could describe the mishap in an exclusive 'scoop' for my paper. 'CHRONICLE Reporter Lives To Tell of Grim Details of Plane Crash', I imagined the screaming headline with an 'intro' that would put me among the great 'We-Saw-It-Happen' class of reporters: 'Lying in a hospital, swathed in bloody bandages, the intrepid CHRONICLE reporter who lived through hell, dictated the following eye-witness account of the plane crash at...'

But, mercifully, nothing happened except a few hundred humpy miles of 'air pockets', when J. R. D. was good enough to let the plane soar up, right through the clouds, to a safer altitude. I did not even feel air-sick. Leaving Bombay at the crack of a pinkish dawn, with halts at Indore and Gwalior, we reached Delhi before sunset on a winter evening

We repeated the same schedule in reverse the next day, after a formal ceremony held in New Delhi at an unearthly hour before dawn which I was too sleepy to report properly.

Most of the way we flew too high to be able to see anything of interest below and, at any rate, there was no spectacular crash, no exciting forced landing, to report. J. R. D. (whom I did mistake at first for a raw young pilot) proved a good and safe flier, and we did the return journey without mishap. And so, out of the assumed superior cynicism and affected pose of boredom peculiar to a callow scribbler, I summed up the experience in a three-column headline which read: 'THE GREAT ADVENTURE THAT WAS NOT'

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Many air currents have passed through the Indian stratosphere since then, and our fine-feathered friends have learnt to respect the huge steel-birds that wing their way through the air, and no longer do we hear of eagles and seagulls attacking Gypsy Moths, mistaking them as slightly over-size rivals. No longer does the drone of a plane bring young and old rushing out of houses to observe the strange phenomenon of winged man. Now, when one hears the drone of a Dakota, one simply looks at the watch and observes 'That's the plane for Karachi—I think my watch is running a couple of minutes slow today.' The old-fashioned moralists have stopped preaching on the theme of 'man's outrageous challenge to God and nature' which flying was once supposed to be. Even staid old men and women who get nervous if the speedometer of their car touches thirty-five now calmly ring up to book their air passage for Delhi or Karachi or Calcutta or Colombo—or, for that matter, for London or New York.

A new air-conscious—I almost said 'air-borne'—generation has grown up in India during these years. Little boys in half-pants who were at school when I was about to pass out of the University a dozen years ago have been through the war as fighter pilots, and calmly tell me how they carried out those dangerous—and, often fatal—hedge-hopping and treetop-flying operations in Burma in defiance of deadly Japanese Zeros. Grandsons of pious Pandits who, not long ago believed it was a sin to cross the seas to go to England, and sons of hysterical mothers who invoked the blessings and

protection of all the gods every time any member of their family went on a train journey, now regularly fly huge passenger planes on half a dozen regularly functioning air lines.

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Ministers, businessmen, officials, industrialists, film producers and distributors, sportsmen, doctors, lawyers, even journalists, are now 'taking a plane'—as a matter of routine. Among national leaders and politicians, of course, the flying habit has been introduced and popularized by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, whose naturally youthful and impatient spirit finds proper expression in air travel. If Gandhiji's passion for the *charkha* is characteristic of his ultra-simple way of life, the plane is symbolic of the dynamic modernism of Nehru. He took to flying long before huge 22-seater Dakotas introduced luxury air travel in India. During the 1936 elections he flew thousands and thousands of air-miles, to the remotest places where no plane had ever landed before, in a small and light machine that definitely was not designed for comfort. Once at least his fragile little plane was damaged by the surging, admiring—and one might add, inquisitive—crowd that had come to receive him. More recently, the plane figured prominently in Pandit Nehru's two Kashmir trips and, after being interned at the orders of Premier Kak, when he returned at the bidding of Maulana Azad to attend an urgent meeting of the Working Committee, he flew in the Viceroy's special plane and landed at New Delhi's Willingdon airport long after midnight—one of the rare occasions when night flying (still risky) was permitted in India!

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It is good to feel that if the passenger plane is used by the imperialist and the bureaucrat to hurry them on their questionable errands, it is also of service to national leaders in the pursuit of their patriotic duties. If the industrialist and the capitalist use a plane to expand their spheres of exploitation, it can be (and, indeed, it was during the recent Postal Strike) used by Labour leaders and Trade Union officials to serve the interests of the proletariat. During the revolutionary upsurge of 1942-43, C.I.D. men flew about a great deal to 'shadow' and apprehend 'underground' leaders.

but on one occasion at least an important figure in the underground resistance movement made a neat get-away from the police with the help of a sympathetic aeroplane pilot.

Reduced to fundamentals, a plane is just a machine—it is man who makes it evil or good. He can use it to throw atom bombs or shower flowers (as was, indeed, done recently at Amritsar); he can use it to poison-gas the defenceless population of a city or village (as was done in Abyssinia), or he can use it to spray insecticide fumes to kill crop parasites (as is done in Russia and America); he can use it to drop incendiary bombs to burn a city or to locate and fight forest fires (as is done in Canada); he can use it to kill men, or to save their lives—by rushing doctors and medical supplies!

I once asked a prominent Congress leader who has done a lot of flying (no *not* Pandit Jawaharlal!) how he felt looking down on the earth from a height, say, of 10,000 feet. He said he experienced a feeling of great peace and tranquillity, and the sight of a pigmy humanity far down below induced in him a philosophic contemplation of the insignificance of man and his creations in the vaster scheme of the cosmos. This surprised me, because many pilots have told me that high up in the air they experience a peculiar feeling of superiority, of power and exultation. There they are, high above the petty earth, masters of the skies, riding through and above the clouds—neighbours of God rather than of Man! This feeling comes partly from a physical detachment from the earth and all that is earthy, and partly from the sense of triumph over one of the greatest laws of nature—the law of gravity—that is implicit in the flight of an aeroplane. It is a dangerous feeling and, with the further advance of aviation, it might lead to the development of a complacent, callous and superiority-obsessed Aviator Class, seeking a minority dictatorship over the earth. This danger has already been felt, and warnings have been uttered against it by philosophers and men of vision, and a development like this was visualized in Wells's *The Shape of Things to Come*.

Personally, I have experienced a feeling that is no less dangerous. The bird's-eye-view of the earth below, from a plane, induces in me a pleasant mood of fantasy, an insidious invitation to escape from reality. From 10,000 feet above the

earth, everything looks too beautiful—the ugly spots are obliterated and the pain and the misery, the ugliness and the squalor, are hidden from our view. The patchwork quilt of green paddy fields, shimmering with water, are a pleasant sight for sore eyes. The Lilliputian pigmy peasant driving a toy plough across his handkerchief-size field is a delightfully amusing sight—and not a symbol of exploitation. Even the horrible city slums look like picturesque little dolls' houses. Passing over the chimney town of Ahmedabad it was difficult to imagine that a few thousand feet down below men were stabbing one another, and that the pretty ribbon-like winding roads and lanes were bespattered with blood.

Yes, flying in a luxury plane, one is literally, physically and mentally, detached from the earth and its problems, aloof from, and above, the horror and the filth, the poverty and the ignorance, the cruelty and the exploitation with which this miserable planet of ours abounds.

The danger of flying is not that the plane might crash or develop engine trouble or be lost in fog. (Looking to the recurring incidence of recent train accidents, air travel seems much safer by comparison.) The danger, however, is that, soaring comfortably among the clouds, we might lose sight of, and contact with, the earth and earthy realities.

IT TOLLS FOR THEE !

—August 25

For full seven days I have been telling myself, over and over again: 'What has happened in Calcutta is, indeed, horrible beyond words. But you are a journalist. While writing about it you must be cool and calm and objective, and not emotional. Murders, suicides, arson and looting, air raids, tortures in concentration camps, pogroms and massacres, famines and epidemics—a journalist has to learn to regard every form of human stupidity and misery as NEWS, to be evaluated only in terms of a seven-column streamer or a three-column headline.....'

I have tried, tried very hard, to be objective while writing about the Calcutta riots. As a device to aid objectivity, I started writing this, not with my personal views and reaction, but with bits of cold print, what OTHERS have said and written and tried to work out some sort of sequence and meaning in what is otherwise a nightmarish jumble of horrible motives and still more horrible deeds. But the emerging pattern is one of such utter horror—and, what is infinitely worse, of such complete disgrace for our nation—that it is impossible to contemplate it and yet retain an attitude of Olympian aloofness and objectivity.

The cold, bare details of what happened in Calcutta are horrible enough. In living memory no other city anywhere else in the world has witnessed such bloodshed, such carnage and destruction, such an orgy of arson and rape, such a demonstration of hatred and violence. In the twinkling of an eye, as it were, millions of average, peaceful citizens engaged in a score of harmless occupations were turned into dehumanized mobs thirsting for blood, worse than wild animals, for animals seldom kill except to eat, while in Calcutta human beings were being butchered for the sheer fun of it, and even loot was a secondary consideration. Nor was the rioting—if rioting this mass murder can be called—indulged in only by the professional *goondas* and mercenary assassins. Thousands and thousands of otherwise perfectly law-abiding citizens were drawn into this whirlpool of fanatical hatred and brutal violence. The lowest, the basest instincts of the savage man had broken through the centuries-old crust of civilization and the tall, majestic buildings of India's largest city were like the jungle where blood-thirsty primitive beasts prey upon one another.

The week of horror in Calcutta is not, as it is being made out, a simple case of the machinery of law and order breaking down—by callous and wilful design or by criminal neglect. True, Premier Suhrawardy and his Ministers and, no less, Governor Burrows were guilty of gross dereliction of duty in refusing to take the necessary precautions against the outbreak of violence. True, August 16 should not have been declared a holiday. True, Section 144 should have been enforced earlier and the Military called out as soon as the first outbreaks occurred. But is the peace and security of our homes, the lives of our children, the honour of our sisters

and wives and daughters only to depend on the protection that the rifles and machine-guns of imperialist soldiery can afford us? Are we for ever to live under the grim shadow of disaster, venturing forth into the street only with an armed escort? Is our life, our work, our culture and civilization, our art and our literature, to be poisoned by the constant, haunting fear of the assassin's knife? Is Freedom to be nothing more than a precarious security under Martial Law? And are we who demand unconditional and immediate Freedom to suffer the indignity of always running to the imperialist Viceroy for protection?

If that is not the case, then I submit that we have to go deeper into the causes of the Calcutta riots than the superficial issue of whether the Government had made sufficient police *bundobust* or not. It is no law and order that broke down in Calcutta, it was the very structure of human relations. And no amount of patrollings by the military and the police or personal intervention by the Viceroy will restore the foundations of humanity in Calcutta unless.....

Unless steps are taken to purge men's minds of fanaticism and hatred and arrogance and the lust for violence.

This is not an issue that should concern only the leaders or the officials of the Government. It is not an issue that should worry only the people of Calcutta or only the Bengalis. I and you.....and *you*.....and **YOU**.....yes, all of us are inescapably involved in the tragedy and disgrace of Calcutta.

And I do not mean it figuratively. I do not mean it merely in the sense that as Indians we should feel the sorrow and shame of what happened in the city on the banks of the Hooghly. I mean it quite literally. The stream of blood flowing down the drains of Calcutta might soon be a flood that will drown us all. The next dagger might be planted in **YOUR** back, and **MINE** the next corpse to be stuffed into a sewer. Nor do I fear only the danger that we, in Bombay and Poona and Nagpur and Delhi and Lahore and Peshawar and Karachi, might be the victims of similar riots and murders and be killed. The even more frightening prospect is that if the seeds of hatred that have sprouted into a bloody crop in Calcutta are now transplanted to the soil of other cities and towns and villages, we might ourselves turn into killers. Once

fanaticism is allowed to become rampant and humanitarian scruples are overcome by blind hatred, it doesn't take long to make an assassin out of a peaceful citizen.

There are lakhs of villages and thousands of cities and towns where, as in Calcutta, Hindus and Muslims are living and working together. There is no practicable way of separating their existence. (It will require several thousand Pakistans to accomplish complete isolation of the followers of the two faiths). If the prejudices and passions that caused the murder of ten thousand in Calcutta are allowed to spread all over the country (and there are ominous signs of that) then what hope is there that the shame and horror of Calcutta will not be repeated a hundred times?

Yes, as I said, we are deeply, inescapably involved in the tragedy of Calcutta—in a much more real and urgent sense than the poet John Donne meant when he wrote:

*Do not send to know for whom the bell tolls.
It tolls for thee. It tolls for thee. It tolls for thee.*

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Few people are more conscious than I am of the dangerously jingoistic ideology that is being fostered among the Muslim masses by the leaders and demagogues of the League. Extracts selected at random from the brief press reports of the proceedings of the last meeting of the League Council in Bombay are eloquent enough. And yet they were the utterances of comparatively moderate and responsible leaders. Moreover, that is what was said in the presence of the non-Muslim and foreign press. What some of the *chhota* League leaders say to their small-town audiences is something much more pointed and fanatical. I have heard them speak both on the platform and in private. I am familiar with the way the sentiments of the mob are roused to fever pitch: 'We conquered this country by the sword. By the sword we will reconquer it.....'

Simple, unsophisticated minds, already labouring under a sense of grievance because of economic backwardness and justly resentful of the complacent arrogance of the Hindus' caste system, are ideally suited for the germination of fanaticism. To the average Muslim, Pakistan represents the vague but tantalizing vision of a Muslim Empire in which the

faithful will enjoy special privileges. It has no relation whatever to the modern conceptions of democratic autonomy, cultural or any other sort—as I have always been trying to tell my naive (or self-deluded?) Communist friends who (even until August 16) were rejoicing in what they insisted on calling the ‘freedom urge of the Muslim masses’. It took ten thousand lives for the obvious, self-evident truth to dawn upon Comrade P.C. Joshi that ‘the League “struggle” does not touch the British imperialists at all, but directly becomes an actual anti-Hindu struggle’.

Deeply conscious as I am of this background of Muslim fanaticism, I cannot overlook the fact that (only in a slightly less acute form) there is a substratum of anti-Muslim prejudice and even hatred in the minds of a large number of Hindus. There are historical reasons for this (for example, the inherited resentment against Muslim invasions) even as there are economic causes for the Muslims’ sense of grievance. Impartial non-Muslim reporters and correspondents of nationalist newspapers have described how violently the Hindus in Calcutta retaliated to the initial assaults by Muslims. Indeed, they are agreed that once the rioting had begun in brutality and senseless blood-lust there was little to choose between the two groups. Surely, all the murderous attacks by Hindus on Muslims were not made in self-defence. They were, like similar acts of the Muslims, the brutal and ugly expressions of that hate which, alas, still lurks in the hearts of many Hindus and many Muslims.

I do not for a moment believe that Pakistan or any scheme for the political isolation of the two communities is a solution of this psychological problem. But one cannot make it disappear simply by ignoring or denying it. And it certainly does not inspire confidence among the minorities for the majority to colour political nationalism with the superstitions and ritual of its particular faith.

And yet.....

There are several hundred years of experience of living together to bring the Hindu and the Muslim together—the peasants’ loyalty to the same land, traditions of friendship and good-neighbourliness, the sharing together of communal joys and sorrows, and, most important of all, the common bond of slavery which, through two centuries of alien rule, has forged

the Indian nation on the anvil of history! Despite Calcutta and all its horrors, we have to prove—to the world and to ourselves—that these ties of common experience are stronger than the hammer-blows of fanaticism and imperialist intrigue. For if we can't, then we are doomed.

THIS IS LAHORE

—December 8

Lahore is the capital of the Punjab; the last stronghold of the British Bureaucracy; the last resting place of Jehangir and Anarkali, of Lala Lajpat Rai, Iqbal and Bhagat Singh; it is the headquarters of the Khaksars and the Ahrars; it is the home of Malik Khizr Hayat Khan, Sardar Baldev Singh, Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, Dewan Chaman Lal, Mian Iftikharuddin, Allama Mashriqi, K. L. Gauba and Durga Mota, the funny fat man of the films.

Lahore is the centre of male and female fashions, where students dress like actors and actors dress like gigolos, where 'Society' ladies dress flashily like courtesans, courtesans dress soberly like college girls, and college girls go about attired like mannequins. Lahore is the original 'home-land' of the so-called 'Khazanchi' dress—*shalwar* and shirt and *dupatta*—which has become the rage in Bombay and Madras, but in Lahore itself more and more girls seem to prefer the Bengali sari or the Lucknow *gharara*.

Lahore is a gay and vivacious town where life begins at thirty and drinking at 5-30, where whisky and brandy and beer and gin flow more freely than the water in the sluggish Ravi, where you cause raised eye-brows and looks of wonderment if you go to a restaurant and ask for a glass of plain water; where college boys take a course in beer with History and Economics for their F.A. and graduate in whisky a couple of years later; where businessmen drink like film folk, and film folk drink like—fish!

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Lahore is a gay and vivacious town where there are more Bars than bookshops, and far more people turn up at cabarets than in any temple or mosque, where the sons of illiterate zamindars may be seen dancing with 'Made-in-India' blondes, and daughters of Shaikhs and Lalas learn to sway their hips to the rhythm of the rhumba.

Lahore is a cosmopolitan town and, attired in Savile Row suits, Hindu and Muslim and Sikh drown their communal individuality in a mug of beer. Lahore is a 'democratic' town, like New York or Chicago, where snobbish distinctions between aristocrat and the plebian have been done away with, and you are as good as the next man—provided you have the same amount of money!

Lahore has a healthy climate and beneath the layers of Coty's powder you may really find naturally rosy cheeks. Here tall men walk without a stoop, and broad-shouldered boys are not necessarily wearing coats with padded shoulders! This is the town of handsome men and beautiful girls—though sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between a curly-haired handsome man and a tall and strong beautiful woman.

Lahore is a wonderful town (particularly for a visitor from Bombay) where you get real milk for your tea and real cream for your coffee, where ice-cream is still made with milk and cream, and not with cocoanut water or saccharine *sherbet*, where *chapatis* are still made with pure wheat flour unmixed with bajri or jowar or American maize.

Lahore has some other traditions, too, besides those of colourful fashions and non-stop drinking.

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It was in Lahore that redoubtable terrorist heroes like Bhagat Singh wrote a flaming chapter in the history of the Indian freedom struggle with their blood.

It was in Lahore, on the banks of the Ravi, that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru unfurled the flag of complete independence.

It was Lahore that produced patriots like Lala Lajpat Rai, poets and philosophers like Iqbal, literary stylists like Maulana Zafar Ali Khan, orators like Ataullah Shah Bukhari, modern poets like Faiz and Raashid, and great short-story writers like Krishenchander and Rajendar Singh Bedi.

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A city is like a man—a paradoxical mixture of good and bad. It is as true of Lahore, as of Bombay or Delhi or London or New York. For a city is not buildings and roads and parks. A city is people. And the people of Lahore are good and bad, hospitable and spendthrift, outspoken and crude, boisterous and vulgar of tongue, revolutionaries and loyalists, strong-willed and fanatical large-hearted and mean-minded, gourmands and gluttons, brilliant conversationalists and drunken bores. In short—human. Intensely HUMAN.

The things you love most in Lahore: The colours and smart styles of ladies' dresses; the lawns and artificial miniature hills in Lawrence Garden; the fine food in the restaurants; the gay crowds on the Mall or in front of cinemas on Macleod Road; the heart-warming hospitality of every one you meet; the cold crisp air.

The things you hate most in Lahore: The dust and dirt and filth on the roadsides; the unlovely variety of abusive words in Punjabi that you hear uttered; the piles of semi-pornographic trash turned out by some local publishers; the high prices in restaurants and the scarcity of good tea.

LAHORE

GARDEN OF MARTYRS

—December 15

I have just returned from a fairly long car trip through what may be described as the industrial belt of the Punjab, a hundred and twenty miles from Lahore, and back.

In popular conception the Punjab is supposed to be an agricultural province, and so I was prepared to see the vast fertile plain stretching into the distance on either side of the road, a plain quilted with fields of wheat and sugarcane and paddy and mustard and cabbage and sweet peas and a dozen other varieties of vegetables. But I had not imagined that I would find this whole countryside dotted with factories and

workshops, their tall chimneys spouting thick acrid smoke across the clear blue winter sky. Not to speak of people outside, few even in the Punjab realize that this province is fast becoming one of the leading industrial centres in the country; next in importance only to the three presidencies of Bombay, Bengal and Madras.

From Lahore to Amritsar, a distance of 35 miles, there is hardly a mile-long stretch which has no industrial plant. Both the cities have industrial suburbs spreading far into the countryside, so that very soon the two cities will merge into each other to form a 45 or 50-mile-long metropolis. Amritsar is a growing textile producing centre, the biggest market for woollen goods in Northern India. From the warehouses in its narrow, tortuously winding lanes and bye-lanes are exported millions of yards of silk and woollen material, not only to all parts of India, but even to foreign countries.

Amritsar, however, does not derive its importance only from its piece-goods trade but from two historic monuments—one to the glory of God and the other to the martyrdom of Man! 'Durbar Sahib', as the Golden Temple, the holy of holies for the Sikhs, is locally and popularly known, is a noble pile of marble set like a jewel in the centre of a huge square tank and approached by a single marble causeway. The gold leaf covering the dome and the upper part of the shrine (in my view) somewhat spoils the effect of austere beauty by giving the place a gaudy and glittering appearance—more a sight for the tourist and the gold-minded philistine than a place for the contemplation of the infinite! But without this display of gold, it wouldn't be the GOLDEN Temple.

To call it a temple at all, indeed, can only be ascribed to the ignorance and presumption of the White Sahibs. Here you see no images, no religious sculpture of any kind, no frescoes on the walls, no incense burning or vermilion painting or any other Brahminical ritual. In the central vestibule an original manuscript of the *Granth Sahib*, the sacred book of the Sikhs, is kept carefully wrapped and covered with flowers. That is all. And those who know something about the historical origin of the Sikh religion and how the gospel of Guru Nanak sought to integrate the best in Islam with the best in Hinduism, preaching the doctrine of tolerance and

peace and brotherhood of man, would wish that it were not kept in reverential isolation, but blazoned forth for the world to behold and read and ponder over.

How the ego in man seeks cheap 'immortality' is demonstrated by the vulgar display of the names, addresses and occupations of the donors who contributed towards the additional constructions and repairs to the holy shrine. These names and addresses are engraved on the marble flooring and, while contemplating the lofty doctrines preached by the great Guru Nanak, you might also find edification in the information that Sardar Lehna Singh of village Attari, in District Lahore, donated the princely sum of ten rupees on the auspicious occasion of the birth of his first son and heir, or that Sardar Dasonda Singh donated fifteen rupees when his son passed the Matriculation examination—presumably in Third Class.

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Passing along an amazing labyrinth of lanes and crooked alleys, most of them too narrow for a car or any other vehicle to pass, you come to the narrow passage which bears a legend famous in the history of the Indian freedom movement. **JALLIANWALA BAGH.**

Going through this solitary entrance, one confronts an inscription which, for the first time, marks a memorial not to a king or conqueror, but to the martyrdom of the common people in the cause of the freedom of their country. This is how it reads:

'This ground was hallowed by the mingled blood of fifteen hundred innocent Hindus, Mussalmans and Sikhs who were martyred by British bullets on 13th April 1919. The ground was acquired from the owners by public subscription.

Secretary, Managing Committee, Jallianwala Bagh Memorial Trust, Amritsar.'

To its left is another, smaller, signboard which simply records a grim and horrible outrage: **PEOPLE WERE FIRED FROM HERE.**

And all at once, you are carried by a wave of remembrance to those grim and glorious, terrifying and uplifting days of the Khilafat agitation and the first Non-Co-operation Movement, when British imperialism tried its utmost to crush the rebellious spirit of the Punjab under the iron heel of Martial

Law; when that diabolic pair, Governor Michael O'Dwyer and General Dyer, perpetrated unspeakable horrors and indignities on the people of this province; when little children in the towns and villages were made to stand for hours in the sun to watch the white-faced 'Tommies' of the British cavalry ride past in all their imperial glory. Looking around the hermetically enclosed Bagh, surrounded by buildings on all sides, one knows that when Dyer marched his troops into Jallianwala Bagh on that fateful afternoon of April 13, 1919, it was with the arrogant determination to kill, to spare no one who dared to defy the Raj by assembling at that meeting. And the seven hundred running pages of the Malaviya Report which chronicled the grim sequence of events in blood curdling detail, come to life. Once again, the silence of the summer sky is rent by the volleys of rifle fire; once again the moans and groans of the dead and the dying fill the air; once again the blood of the Hindu and the Muslim and the Sikh mingles and flows into the thirsty soil. This, indeed, is hallowed, consecrated ground on which one stands.

LAHORE

1947

**The Year of the Partition, the Birth of
Pakistan, and the Advent of
Freedom!**

THE MELODY THAT IS NO MORE

—January 26

In 1935 the Indian film industry was just emerging from its first stage of development. The gaudy 'mythologicals', the tinsel 'historicals' and the crude and naive 'socials' which had held the field so long were at last giving place to a better type of film. The advent of the talkies had caused a spate of musicals and put a premium on educated actors and actresses who could not only sing, but speak Hindustani fluently as well. A better type of director and writer was entering the cinema field and consequently the intelligentsia which had so far looked with contempt at *all* Indian productions was at last beginning to take notice of films like *Seeta*, *Pooran Bhakt* and *Chandidas*.

Then came *Devdas*, based on a story of that name by Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, and directed with astonishing sensitivity by a young director who was later to win all-India fame—Barua. *Devdas* was, in one sense, the first *real* 'social' film produced in India—i. e. it posed the problem of the individual's relation to society and treated the subject with realism and psychological insight. The characterizations, the dialogue, even the songs, had a quiet dignity, so refreshingly different from the noisy clap-trap of the average 'social' film. It had one thing more—Saigal!

Kundan Lal Saigal, former clerk and salesman, was gifted with a 'golden' voice which was much in demand for impromptu *musicales* at his friends' parties. It was with this asset that he gatecrashed into the world of talking pictures. He was given minor singing roles in a couple of New Theatres films before he was assigned the title role in *Chandidas*. But it was in *Devdas* that he revealed himself to be as great an actor as he was a singer.

There is hardly a cine-goer in India who is not familiar with the story of *Devdas*. Taking the theme of frustrated love, the author had delicately and masterfully etched a series of memorable characters—Devdas, the sensitive young man, too weak to wrest happiness from the unwilling hands of

society, drifting to his doom *via* the drunkards' alley; Parvathi, the frail Indian girl, so calm, so dignified, so brave, even while being consumed by the inner flame of her love; Chandra, the singing girl, whose unselfish love for Devdas lifted her like a lotus out of the mire and slush of her filthy environment. But the most memorable, the most haunting character of them all was that of Devdas—a symbol, as it were, of the frustration of a whole generation of Indian youth whose lives had become twisted and characters perverted because of disappointment in love, whose happiness had been sacrificed at the altar of parental authority and the snobbish pride and prejudices of society. There was an epic quality about the tragedy of Devdas which raised it far above the stature of common filmic characters. And in popular imagination, right up to this day, the character of Devdas has been identified with the personality of Saigal. Think of the one and you think of the other.

After Devdas, Saigal played many important roles in pictures both in Calcutta and Bombay, including such famous ones as Tansen and the poet Suhail in *Shah Jehan*. His income rose from a hundred rupees to nearly Rs. 10,000 per month. He sang many memorable songs in many memorable films. But *Devdas* will remain the greatest role and the greatest picture of his career and the songs of frustration that he sang in it will continue to haunt our imagination.

Sarat Chatterjee's character, Devdas, drank himself to death. And so, in a way, did Kundan Lal Saigal, whose death is reported from his home town in the Punjab. A charming companion, innately modest and completely unspoilt by his phenomenal popularity, generous and kind, interested in humanitarian, progressive and patriotic causes, he had but one weakness—his reckless devotion to the bottle! His health, never very robust, had been completely shattered by alcohol and during the past year had been causing anxiety and alarm to his relations, friends and admirers. During the 'shooting' of his last picture, *Shah Jehan*, for which he sang the last great songs of his career, a doctor had to be in attendance on him all twenty-four hours of the day and night.

The Devdas of fiction drank to drown his frustration in love. What secret sorrow sent Saigal craving for the bottle we do not know. Was it the unsatisfied ego of an artist that sought refuge in liquor? Or was it a decade long hangover

from his more than realistic portrayal of Devdas the drunkard? Whatever the reason, Saigal has taken the mystery of his life to the funeral pyre with him. (Again the parallel of the last funeral pyre scene of *Devdas* irresistibly occurs to one's mind)

Saigal is dead. But, thanks to the sound track and the gramophone record, his voice shall not die; it will continue to sing of the joys and sorrows of life, to sadden and inspire us, and to fill our beings with that sense of haunting melody that was the essence of his singing.

WHERE IS MY SENSE OF HUMOUR?

—May 25

A friend of the 'Last Page' writes to complain that this feature is becoming too serious and sour-faced. He even doubts if it is the same old 'Chronicler', adding, almost with desperation: 'Good heavens, man, where is your sense of humour?'

I plead guilty to the charge. Being the most regular and (perhaps) most critical reader of this Page, I have myself felt the old liveliness gone out of it, the familiar ring of optimism giving place to the moans and groans of pessimism. So I can understand the annoyance of my friend. For I, too, have often asked myself the question: 'Good heavens, man, where is your sense of humour?'

Yes where is it?

Perhaps, it lies buried under the debris of Hall Bazar that I saw in Amritsar, a gigantic pile of rubble that reminded one of the ruins of blitzed Coventry or atom-bombed Hiroshima.

Perhaps, it was drowned in the rivers of blood, Hindu blood and Muslim blood, your blood and mine, that have

been flowing in the streets of Calcutta, in Noakhali, in Bihar, in the U. P., the Punjab and the North-West Frontier Province, not to mention the occasional bloody spurts in the streets of our own Bombay.

Perhaps, it was burnt to ashes in the conflagrations of Lahore; perhaps it was burnt along with the half a dozen unfortunates who were sprinkled with petrol and burnt alive in Amritsar, or with those other victims of communal fury who were trapped in a burning 'Victoria' in Bombay and reduced to ashes while a frenzied mob, laughing demoniacally, barred all ways of escape from this living hell.

Perhaps, it has been ravished along with the women, your sisters and my sisters, your mothers and mine, who have been assaulted and dishonoured during recent shameful months.

Perhaps, the smile on the face of this Page, like the smiles on the faces of many of us, has been wiped out by the sight of inhuman horrors that our eyes have seen and that this Page has chronicled

The tragedy is so awful, so overwhelming, not because so many have been killed, but because so many have been killed in vain.

The tragedy is so grim, not because we (who were once pledged to non-violence even when fighting the enemies of our national freedom) have killed, but because we have killed our own brothers.

The tragedy is so vast, not because ten thousand or twenty thousand or a hundred thousand of us, Indians, Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs, have turned fanatical killers, but because the rest of us, the four hundred million of us, have either connived at it, gloried in the atrocities committed by the partisans on their communal rivals, or have just watched the gory spectacle with abject apathy.

The tragedy is so shameful, not because individually we have disgraced ourselves, but because collectively we have disgraced the land of our birth in the eyes of the world; we have given the enemies of our freedom an opportunity to laugh at us; in the last hour of foreign rule we have supplied a justification for two centuries of oppression and tyranny.

Yet, perhaps, there is some sort of humour—a very grim sort of humour—in the situation.

The national movement and the national organization that launched their first struggle against the Partition of Bengal have now launched their last struggle to achieve the partition not only of Bengal but also of the Punjab!

The architects of unity, the crusaders of Akhand Hindustan, have become the propagandists of Partition, while the upholders of Pakistan and the two-nation theory like Suhrawardy are singing to the tune of unity.

My Communist friends, who always ridiculed me for my sentimental *petite bourgeoisie* faith in the unity of India and hostility for the ideology of Pakistan, who were ready to divide India into two or twenty pieces in pursuance of their theory of self-determination, have suddenly become fanatical believers in the unity of India.

And so, in the same boat we find Mr Sarat Bose, Mr Suhrawardy and Comrade P. C. Joshi! The Forward Bloc, the Bengal League and the Communist Party have at last found something in common.

Mahatma Gandhi, the Communists, the Congress Socialists and Sir Feroz Khan Noon all want the British Government to 'QUIT NOW', while the former firebrand and uncompromising enemy of Imperialism, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, stays as house guest at the same Viceregal Lodge that has been the symbol of Imperialism all these years.

Allama Mashriqi thinks we can find unity and freedom by following his Khaksar volunteers in their symbolic half-hour march, while Raja Mahenderpratap believes he can solve the whole problem by touring the villages in a bullock cart, propagating the 'ARYAN' state. Sane Guruji, a Socialist, has won a resounding victory against orthodoxy by getting the doors of the Vithoba Temple at Pandharpur opened for the untouchables by the very un-Socialist method of resorting to a fast unto death, while Mr Gadre, a veteran of the Hindu Mahasabha and film publicity, is fasting to get a lakh of rupees for Hindu *sangathan* and relief.

The *goondas* of Amritsar have provoked their compatriots of Lahore by sending them bangles, as a symbol of cowardice, and now the Lahore *goondas* are proving their valour and their manhood by setting fire to their city.

Nero only fiddled when Rome was burning. He at least did not set fire to it.

WHO KILLED INDIA ?

—June 8

Never before in the entire twelve years' existence of All-India Radio has the radio played such an important part in the making—or, rather, the recording—of history as it did on the evening of June 3, when the speeches of Lord Mountbatten, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Mr Jinnah and Sardar Baldev Singh were broadcast.

Literally millions all over India sat glued to their or their neighbours' radio sets. There were crowds of hundreds surrounding radio shops and restaurants. From Peshawar to Travancore, from Karachi to Shillong, the whole country had become one enormous, collective ear, waiting for the broadcasts breathlessly, helplessly, hopelessly. Never before in the history of the world has the destiny of so many depended upon the words that would fall from the mouths of so few.

Pakistan and Partition had been in the air for too long for any one to be surprised by the content of these broadcasts. The 'Special Correspondents' and their 'sources close to Whitehall' had for once been quite correct in their forecasts. When we sat down that evening to listen-in, we knew exactly what was coming. And yet, when it came, one could hardly believe one's ears. And, as one after another, the four speakers of the evening reiterated the fact of Partition, the thought kept hammering away at one's mind: Can a Mountbatten, a Nehru, a Jinnah, a Baldev Singh—or even all four of them together—deny a historical and psychological reality? Can they conjure away the oneness of India and divide it into two separate countries—Pakistan (truncated) and Hindustan (non-*akhanda*)?

The tones of the speeches were significant—you might even say, symbolic.

The Viceroy—sorry (as the announcer corrected himself) I mean the Governor-General—was confident, complacent, patronizing. He knew he had done a good job and he expected compliments and congratulations, which were soon forthcoming from the three speakers who followed.

Jawaharlal Nehru (as he was announced without the prefix of Pandit) was choked with emotion, rhetorical rather than

conversational, indulging in the professional writer's weakness to cloak inconvenient and unpleasant facts with a pretty turn of phrase. He talked of Indians being 'on the march', of 'the goal' and 'the journey's end'; of 'months of sore trial and difficulty, anxiety, and sometimes even of heart-break' and of his abiding faith 'in the great destiny of India which takes shape, even though with travail and suffering', before, 'with no joy in my heart', he commended 'the vital change affecting the future of India'. *Jai Hind*.

If Panditji has still to acquire a conversational radio manner, Mr Jinnah was clearly just a novice before the microphone. But his sense of triumph and elation came through, even if (like all new broadcasters) he messed up his words now and then. 'It is the first time, I believe' he said, 'that a non-official has been afforded an opportunity to address people through the medium of this powerful instrument direct to the people on political matters,' reading historic significance in his first broadcast. *Pakistan Zindabad*.

Sardar Baldev Singh had nothing to say, and he said it badly. He was included, I suppose, to placate the 'valiant Sikhs' and to reassure the *jawans* of the Army, Navy and Air Force that even if the *Sarkar* was quitting, their 18 rupee *phagaar* was secure under the new dispensation.

It would have been all so amusing, even funny, if it were not for the tragic implications of what was said. 'With no joy in my heart'—Pandit Jawaharlal's words might well have been the theme-song of the moment. I saw tears in the eyes of people listening-in along with me. Death is final, inevitable, yet every time someone dear to us passes away, human sentiment protests, revolts, bursts out in a flood of tears. How does one mourn the death of a country, one's country, the beloved motherland?

Ram nam sat hai! God is truth. Truth is God!

Inna lillah-e, wah inna ilaihe rajioon. From God we came, and to God we must return!

Dust we are and to dust return!

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An Indian Edgar Wallace with the deep insight into the Indian mind of a Gandhi, the historical vision of a Nehru and the uncanny sixth sense of Sherlock Holmes (It's not so

elementary, my dear Watson!) is required to write this colossal murder mystery?

Who killed India? Yes, indeed, who did?

Was it the fell work of an insane individual, a stab in the back in a communal riot, or the diabolical conspiracy of a gang? Was it third degree murder or a case of slow poisoning? Or, as it might be, was it a more diabolical, more cunning, murder plan, in which the victim himself was hypnotically induced to commit suicide?

Here is this prosecution witness's, this 'Chronicler's' testimony for what it is worth.

India was killed by Britain. The first blow was struck when the British instigated and encouraged the Muslims to demand separate electorates and then conceded it. That was the first step towards Pakistan, however copious the crocodile tears Lord Mountbatten may now shed over the mortal remains of United India.

India was killed by Britain and her 'Divide and Rule' policy. BUT NOT BY BRITAIN ALONE.

India was killed by the fanatical Muslim Leaguers who played upon their community's apprehensions and fears to produce in them a peculiar psychosis which was a dangerous combination of inferiority complex, aggressive jingoism, religious fanaticism, and fascistic *Herrenvolk* legends.

India was killed by the fanatical Hindus, the Hindu Fascists and Hindu imperialists, the dreamers of a Hindu empire, the crusaders of Hindu *sangathan*, who provided ideological fuel for the fire of Muslim communalism and fanaticism.

India was killed by the Hindu communalists, the believers in and supporters of Hindu exclusiveness as evidenced by their patronage of communal Hindu institutions like swimming baths and schools and colleges who yet masqueraded as Nationalists and Congressmen, who prevented the National Congress and the National movement from becoming a fully representative, completely non-communal freedom front of all Indian patriots.

India was killed by the Communist Party of India which (during the days of its 'People's War' and 'pro-Pakistan' policies) provided the Muslim separatists with an ideological basis for their irrational and anti-national demand for Pakistan-

(Phrases like 'homeland', 'nationalities,' 'self-determination', etc., were all ammunition supplied by the Communists to the legions of Pakistan.)

India was killed, stabbed in the heart, by every Hindu who killed a Muslim, by every Muslim who killed a Hindu, by every Hindu or Muslim who committed or abetted or connived at arson and rape and murder during the recent (and earlier) communal riots.

That an imperialist power planned the dismemberment of our country in the very hour of our freedom is not surprising. The wonder, and the tragedy, however, is that India should have been killed by the children of India. *The realization on our part, in a mood of humility born of sorrow, might well be the first step towards the resuscitation, the phoenix-like rebirth, of United India. Like old soldiers, old countries never die.....*

THE SHAPE OF FREEDOM

—June 15

Frankly, I am sick and tired of this grim and gloomy partition business, and all that is being talked about it, and written about it, even by me!

Isn't there something else, something better and more cheerful and more hopeful that one can talk and write about.

Yes, there is. I read it in this morning's paper: The Government of Bombay are going to dig fifty thousand wells in a five-year plan for improving the water supply situation in the province.

To my mind, digging these fifty thousand wells is more important than all the resolutions of the Congress and the League and the Constituent Assembly put together.

Water is more important than Pakistan, more important than Unity, even more important than Freedom. Without water there can be no Freedom, for there can be no life. Think of the millions in this province and other parts of the country

who are deprived even of the prime necessity of life—water—and depend on the brackish, disease-carrying fluid from unhealthy pools and ponds, and the far-reaching significance of the Bombay Government's decision begins to dawn on you.

And I am glad that the Bombay Government are going about this well-digging task in a scientific manner and have decided to train a large personnel with the needful knowledge of geology, climatology, physiography and the methods of location of water.

I wish they would go further and declare in unequivocal terms that these wells will belong to the people, all the people, regardless of caste or creed.

What is Freedom? What shape will it have? What shape should it have? For many years, even as we have struggled for it, passed resolutions, borne lathi charges, courted imprisonment, faced firing from police and military rifles, we have asked these questions.

Many of us thought Freedom would look like a resolution of independence printed on fancy paper. Others believed Freedom was the right to put a cross on a ballot paper. Still others thought of Freedom as a P. & O. liner carrying the British out of India. And they were not quite wrong. The Constituent Assembly, the Charter of Independence, the British declaration of their intention to transfer power and quit, the ballot papers, they are all symbols—important symbols—of Freedom. But they are not Freedom.

Now I know what Freedom looks like. It looks like fifty thousand new wells, bubbling with clean, healthy water, for the people of Bombay Province. What an alien, imperialist bureaucracy could not give our people in a hundred years, our own Ministers will give us in five.

Next to the report about the fifty thousand wells was a Madras message about the historic Vaishnavite temple in Triplicane being opened to the Harijans. That is good news, too, even as some weeks ago it was good to hear that the Vithoba Temple in Pandharpur was at last being opened to the Harijans. And yet those wells are more important. Water is more important than religion; without water there can be no religion, because there can be no life.

So Freedom means more wells for the people.

But not wells alone.

Schools. Primary education, free and compulsory. Free and equal opportunity to all for higher education.

Wells. And schools. And canals. Reclamation of wastelands. Reafforestation. Bunding. Agricultural research.

Less hours of work, more pay, more leisure, more opportunity for cultural development, better houses, for the working class. Collective bargaining, social security, insurance against sickness and accident. Nationalization of key industries. Abolition of landlordism.

Wells. And schools. And libraries. Parks. Stadiums. Playgrounds. Art galleries. Theatres. Cinemas. And all for the PEOPLE.

Now we see the emerging shape of freedom. These fifty thousand wells are important, but only as a beginning.

DISASTER

—July 27

In the beehive that is the Central Secretariat in New Delhi, there are several thousand rooms in which work Honourable Members, Secretaries of departments, Joint Secretaries, Deputy Secretaries, Under-Secretaries, Directors and Deputy Directors, Superintendents, Head Clerks and Clerks.

Between them they deal with thousands and thousands and thousands of letters, applications for this and that, reports, drafts, circulars every day. To accommodate these millions of documents, they have several hundred thousands of files and an intricate system of docketing, indexing and storing them in pigeon-holes and cupboards and almirahs.

A letter arrives at the Secretariat from a thousand miles away—from Bombay or Calcutta or Chittagong or Karachi. It is opened by a clerk, then submitted to a Superintendent, who takes it to an Assistant Director or, may be, a Deputy Secretary. It is one letter in a pile of, perhaps, a hundred other letters. It represents one little problem in the welter of so many more important, more urgent, problems. And so it is

buffeted and tossed about on the waves of bureaucratic procedure, for days, for weeks, for months, for years. Then it is filed. Then it is forgotten. It is dead. It is not realized, however, that with it six hundred people may also be dead!

One such letter arrived in the Central Secretariat on the third day of May. The sorter in the General Post Office who threw it in the huge pile of Secretariat letters, the other sorter who placed it in the pigeon-hole marked 'P. & T.', the window delivery clerk who handed it, along with a big bunch of letters and packets and papers, to the uniformed *chaprasi* from the office of the Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs—none of them could have had any premonition about that letter. They did not even bother to look at its postmark. If they had, they would have known it came from Bombay.

The clerk who opened that morning's mail casually tore open the envelope, cast one glance at the letter heading—'Bombay Steam Navigation Company'—and dumped it in the pile to his left. The Superintendent who dealt with that pile came upon that letter, cast his trained eye on the contents, noted that it had something to do with permission to instal a radio on a small coastal steamer called RAMDAS, then put it among 'pending papers'. It would not hurt any one if the installation of a radio on that obscure and insignificant ship was delayed by another day. Well, it did. It cost six hundred lives. But we are anticipating our story.....

The letter went up, the letter went down, various officials scribbled their initials on it, the relevant sections of the Indian Wireless Telegraph Rules were consulted and quoted in appendices attached to the letter, so that soon the letter became a file. But still no action was taken on it, it was kept pending, under consideration, expert opinion was invited to report on it. It went from room to room, out of paper baskets marked 'in', into baskets marked 'out', and everywhere it was delayed for days, sometimes for weeks.....

Meanwhile the S. S. RAMDAS continued to ply between Bombay and Rewas without a wireless connecting it with the ports on either side.

On the twenty-ninth of May another letter arrived in New Delhi, was duly delivered to the office of the Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs. It was a reminder from

the Bombay Steam Navigation Company. The officer who dealt with it called for the relevant file and had this letter also put in. Then the file was again on its crazy, lazy way round and round the Secretariat.

Came the third of June and the announcement that India was to be divided. New Delhi was struck with partitions which paralysed all regular routine work. From Honourable Members down to the merest clerks, every one in the Secretariat had but one thought—the splitting up of the age-old administration. In every office, in every room, sometimes working at the same tables, were clerks who had worked together for years; but now one was packing up his bags for Karachi, while the other saw chances of quicker promotion in Partition and awaited his colleague's departure. In all this excitement no one had any time or inclination to attend to such a minor affair as the setting up of a wireless transmitter on a small coastal steamer named RAMDAS.

With July came the monsoon clouds at last and the steamship company officials, scanning the skies, felt a little uneasy, dashed off another reminder to the P. & T. in New Delhi.

The letter was delivered to the D. G. of the P. & T. on the fourteenth of July, and in course of time, was duly filed. As the file itself had not yet completed its wanderings, no reply to any of the three letters was considered necessary. After all, it could not hurt any one (except, of course, as it happened, the six hundred people who lost their lives!) if the matter were kept pending and under consideration for another few days, weeks or months. What is a year or so, after all, in the life of a Secretariat file?

The 406-ton RAMDAS continued to ply its usual route, chugging along without wireless. By now the belated monsoon had burst over Bombay, the sea had become distinctly rougher, and the little craft found it increasingly difficult to cope with stormy weather. It was by no means a sturdy vessel and with a draught of only seven feet, as a naval officer who had manned it when it was requisitioned by the Navy put it, 'it was just like a cork...we were always afraid to take the vessel out into the deep sea during stormy weather.' But business is business, and the executives of the steamship company were not afraid to send out the vessel, day after day, loaded with passengers far beyond its capacity.

When the seventeenth of July dawned over Bombay, the weather, if not exactly stormy, was not very reassuring, either. On the previous evening there had been a severe gale which had uprooted many trees, and even on the morning of the seventeenth, the sky was overcast with low and grey clouds, while the steady drizzle was being blown about by a wind that certainly was not a pleasant morning breeze.

It was in this weather that more than seven hundred passengers stepped on to the decks of the S. S. RAMDAS that morning, at the Ferry Wharf. They had arrived before dawn, after trudging on foot through the rain; some had stayed in the waiting shed overnight. Most of them had done this Bombay-to-Rewas trip many times over—it was only a cross-harbour run that took hardly two hours—and had no premonition of disaster as they stepped up the gangplank. If anything, they looked forward to a cool morning voyage.

Crowded like cattle on the covered decks, they were a motley crowd—mostly working-men from the coastal villages of Konkan, going home for a brief holiday; Hindus and Muslims and Christians; men and women and children. In the upper class cabins there were a small number of well-to-do people also, including a Major of the Royal Engineers and his family, and a newly-married couple on their honeymoon.

They were all chatting and crowding round the tea-stall when the ship's siren sounded and the vessel put out to sea at 8.5 a.m. It was already raining down from a leaden sky that seemed to merge completely into the sea, and as the steamer emerged from the shelter of the wharf, the wind-swept rain began to beat down on the starboard side. Canvas screens had been fixed on either side to keep out the rain, but a gale was blowing from the sea and rain-drops were blown in through the gaps left between the screens, which were getting filled with wind, like sails,

The captain of the ship, Sheikh Suleman Ibrahim, a veteran of coastal navigation, felt a little uneasy as the Bombay skyline disappeared in the rain and the mist, for within a few minutes of leaving the wharf the RAMDAS had begun to roll. He instructed the Chief Officer to go round the passenger decks and see to it that the passengers were evenly distributed to keep the ship on an even keel.

At 8-20 the ship was rolling even more dangerously. But in his twenty-five years' experience of navigation Suleman Ibrahim had braved even worse storms and, though things looked ominous today, he did not think there was any real danger. But what was that?

The vessel was struck by a swell of more than ordinary intensity which tore a hole through the protective screens and set the decks awash. The rain now began to beat in fiercely through the gaping hole in the canvas. The passengers, particularly the women and children, who were getting almost panicky, began to run over to the other side to avoid getting wet. The Chief Officer saw this and shouted to them, 'Remain where you are, or you will upset the boat.' But his voice was drowned in the roar of the sea and the steady drone of the engines and the cries of women and children. And the passengers continued to rush with their belongings to the other side.

The ship reeled under the blow of yet another swell. The 'cork' was now bobbing up and down, already almost shrouded in huge waves which were going over it in gigantic sheets of water.

The Captain, knowing the limitations of his craft, saw serious danger ahead. Two thoughts simultaneously occurred to him, as he sent a silent prayer to the heavens above. He wondered whether the ship would hold for another forty minutes which it would take to reach Rewas. And, preparing his mind for the worst, he wished he had a wireless on board to intimate the shipping authorities both in Bombay and Rewas to stand by in case of

Then it came—a gigantic swell. From the bridge the Captain could see it, as if in slow motion, rising like a deep sea monster and charging his little ship with evil ferocity. Struck on the starboard side, the RAMDAS listed like a helpless drunkard on the port side and never recovered its balance. Next moment it had begun to capsize and go under.

Within the split second at their disposal some of the ship's crew tried to release the life-saving apparatus—belts and boats—and shouted to the passengers to catch hold of them, but in that moment of panic, people were either screaming with terror or struck dumb by the spectre of death looming large over them.

Hundreds were violently flung into the open sea—a desperate struggling mass of humanity, some dying instantly of fright and shock, some drowned helplessly before they could comprehend what had happened, while others battled with the huge, angry waves for sheer survival. Some could swim and many could not and, in some cases, those who could not clung pathetically to those who could and dragged them down with them to a watery grave.

Trapped in his cabin as he smashed his way out into the water through the porthole, the Captain once again desperately wished he had had a wireless transmitter on board to call for help from port. For now he was not thinking of saving the ship, but of saving the passengers.

The time was 8-45 a.m.

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Punctually as ever, at 10 a.m., the New Delhi Secretariat came to life. Armies of clerks trooped in through the various entrances, pens began to scratch and typewriters to clatter. The *Burra Sahibs* came a little later, took off their coats, rolled up their sleeves, told their peons to increase the speed of the electric fans, for it was a hot and sultry day.

In the office of the Director-General of Posts and Telegraphs a clerk, searching for some papers that had been misplaced, came upon a file containing correspondence from the Bombay Steam Navigation Company requesting permission to instal a wireless apparatus on a coastal steamer named **RAMDAS**. He casually turned the pages and, seeing that it had waited long enough, put it in the file to be sent for the consideration of the officer concerned.

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By 11 o'clock more than half the passengers of the **RAMDAS** had gone down to the bottom of the sea along with the ship.

Some had managed to get into boats, some were clinging to rafts, some to lifebelts. But all were at the mercy of the sea that continued to be stormy and was tossing them about in grim playfulness. Some had already helplessly drifted with the current out into open sea. Through rain and mist they could all see the dim but not distant coastline of Bombay. But they had no means of sending an SOS. For all practical purposes they might be floundering in mid-

Atlantic. Clinging to a raft, along with twenty-five other passengers and members of the crew, the Captain again thought with melancholy yearning about that wireless...

Out on the sea four men, two women and one boy of twelve clung to a wooden beam which was hardly big enough to keep all of them afloat. The older woman who had lost her husband and two children and seen them drown with her own eyes was hysterical and kept on shouting: 'Let me die. Let me die'. Two of the men, a bearded Konkani Muslim and a young Christian, had to hold her by the wrists to prevent her from abandoning herself to the fatal current. But it was a difficult job, for the surging waves were sometimes throwing them up yards high and sometimes sucking them into a whirlpool. Moreover, the water was oily—the oil from the engine of the sunken RAMDAS probably had come up to the surface—and it was a problem to keep one's grip firm on anything.....

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12 a.m.—The 'RAMDAS' RADIO file had at last reached the officer's desk. But he had no time to look through it. The immediate issue was the partition of telegraph keys and R.M.S. bags between Hindustan and Pakistan.....

12 a.m.—More than three hours had passed since the RAMDAS sank four miles from the wharfs, in full view of the Bombay skyline, but Bombay knew nothing about it. Nor did Rewas, its destination, about the same distance on the other shore, know anything about it.

* * *

1 p.m.—The officer in New Delhi took up the RAMDAS file, looked at it, took up a pencil to scribble an order on the margin, then he looked at his wrist watch and put away the file. It was time for lunch.....

1 p.m.—Bombay knew nothing about the RAMDA disaster. Nor did Rewas.

1 p.m.—'Let me die,' cried the hysterical old woman and, as the grip of her two companions loosened on her wrists she was carried away to her death by a surging wave. The sturdy young Christian let go of the beam and went after her in a desperate attempt to save her. Coming up for the second time, the will to live seemed to have revived in her; she clung

to him and the next moment both of them went down, sucked into a whirlpool, and were seen no more. Now there were only five people clinging to that beam.

1 p.m.—Seeing this grim drama from his raft, the Captain again thought of the wireless.....

2 p.m.—The official returned from lunch, again took up the RAMDAS file. 'Wireless apparatus?' he mused. But all available wireless apparatus was being partitioned between Hindustan and Pakistan. Hardly a moment to bother about a little coastal steamer. It could not hurt anyone if.....He put away the file.

2-30 p.m.—The beam to which the five survivors—two Muslims and three Hindus—were clinging was suddenly 'partitioned'. The pressure of the water split it at its middle joint. The sudden jerk, not to mention the terrific swell that hit them like a solid wall of water, threw all five off balance. The beam—or, rather, the two beams—slipped from their grip and was carried away. Only the boy was somehow able to catch hold of one part of it and with it was swept away from his companions. They all went down.

2-35 p.m.—The Captain and the survivors on his raft were picked up by a launch.

2-40 p.m.—The news of the disaster having at last reached the other shore through a few survivors who had managed to land there, a telegram was booked at Alibag telegraph office. It read 'RAMDAS foundered near Kansa rock', and was addressed to the Bombay Steam Navigation Company.

3-40 p.m.—The telegram was received at the Central Telegraph Office, Bombay.

4 p.m.—A small fleet of tiny fishing boats was heroically struggling against the tempestuous sea to save the survivors who were still drifting hither and thither on rafts and beams and lifebelts. One of the shipping boats which was returning after a more-than-average 'catch', found it could not carry both fish and survivors without the risk of capsizing. The fishermen calmly proceeded to throw their day's catch—nearly a ton of fish—back into the sea.

5 p.m.—Survivors began to land at isolated spots on the Bombay coast. But the telegram which had reached the Central Telegraph Office at 3-40 had not yet travelled the half-mile to the office of the steamship company.

5 p. m.—The officer in the New Delhi Secretariat called it a day and sent back the file—to be FILED away !

5 p.m.—The boy still clinging to the 'partitioned' beam felt his strength slowly ebbing away. He knew he could not hold on indefinitely, unless.....

6 p.m.—The telegram had not yet been delivered to the shipping company.

7 p.m.—The boy, weakened by hunger and exhaustion, felt his grip on the life-saving beam loo-eningshipping.. .. slipping.....It had slipped from his grip. He was too weak to hold on to it, too weak to struggle as he felt himself going down.....down.....down.....

7.15 p.m.—The telegram announcing the sinking of the RAMDAS, four miles from Bombay, at last reached the office of the owners of the ship.....ten-and-a-half hours after the ship had sunk, four hours and thirty-five minutes after it had been booked at a telegraph office about ten miles away, three and-a-half hours after it had been received at the 'entral Telegraph Office—half a mile away from the shipping office !

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May the souls of the six hundred who drowned with the RAMDAS rest in peace !

But can we rest in peace ?

LETTER TO A CHILD BORN ON AUGUST 15

—August 24

My dear—

Ram or Rahim or Rustam or John or Malti or Mahmuda or Shirin or Alice or whatever else your name is—

Congratulations on your good luck in being born on a day that will be remembered for ever in history and will be cherished by every succeeding generation of Indians—like the Fourteenth of July in France, the Fourth of July in the U.S.A., the Twentieth of October in Soviet Russia.

Congratulations, my young friends to all of you and to each one of you. For, the air that you breathed with your first breath was the air of freedom.

A well-known journalist has proposed that the State should award a special bonus to each one of you, children of Freedom. When you grow up and hear of it, do not regret that the suggestion was not accepted. What better bonus or reward could your country give you than the gift of Freedom?

You who (we fervently hope) will never know the stultifying, choking atmosphere of foreign domination, and will grow up in the healthy, invigorating climate of Freedom, may read in the pages of history the inspiring saga of your country's long fight for self-respect and national independence. You will learn, no doubt, how since the very advent of imperialism patriotic Indians rebelled repeatedly against foreign aggression and fought a losing battle against western science and industry, how they were overpowered as much by the superior efficiency of foreign arms as by the internal dissensions and princely feuds that marked the final phase of feudalism in our country. For nearly a century we were vouchsafed a distorted vision of our own history, taught, for instance, to regard the first war of Indian independence as a 'Sepoy Mutiny'. But you will surely have an unrestricted view of your national history, and I hope you will note with pride the significant fact that, in one form or another, the struggle for freedom was carried on by the common people as well as illustrious patriots and continued, generation after generation, until final victory had been won and independence wrested from the unwilling hands of imperialism.

The Freedom which dawned over the land on the day of your birth was fought for and won by the joint efforts of millions—by Hindus and Muslims and Parsis and Christians and Sikhs and Agnostics and Atheists; by peasants and workers and teachers and lawyers and writers and journalists and artists; by men and women and children; by constitutionalists and revolutionaries; by apostles of the *charkha* and by believers in the cult of the bomb and the revolver. Across the years the echo of their stirring voices will reach you. Their deeds are history !

The Freedom which you inherited on your birthday is the legacy left behind by those who died so that you—and

millions of your generation—shall live; who suffered imprisonment so that you shall be free; who starved so that you shall be fed; and went about half-naked so that you shall have clothes to wear.

It is a legacy of love, of loyalty and devotion, of heroism and martyrdom in the national cause. The legacy of the Rani of Jhansi, of Tilak and Gokhale, Gandhi and Nehru, the Ali Brothers and Ajmal Khan, Bhagat Singh and Sukhdeo, Subhas Bose and his Indian National Army. The legacy of a dynamic, fighting tradition. A legacy of which you, as heirs, may well be proud.

Proud and happy, of course, you should be that you were destined to be born in a free India—a privilege denied to my generation and so many other generations before us. We envy you. Yet you may envy us, too, for we lived in stirring, exciting times. If the era of freedom belongs to you the years of the 'struggle for freedom' belonged to us. 'To travel hopefully is better [or at least more exciting] than to arrive and the true success is to labour.'

Blessed you are to have been born on August 15, 1947. 'Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive—But to be young was very heaven.' All the same, may one point out that you were too young to participate in the celebrations that marked your birthday—the birthday of Freedom? You ought to know about this day—for it was YOUR DAY!

August 15, 1947! You will read of this date in history books, probably also in works of historical fiction. It was on this day that India threw off the foreign yoke. It was on this day that the world's mightiest empire came to terms with a resurgent people. It was on this day that for the first time in human history a revolution was consummated without the use of arms.

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August 15, 1947! You will learn the historical significance of this date, but it is improbable that the spirit of this day, the human drama of the Freedom Festival, its tempo and tempestuous pageantry, can ever be fully conveyed to you. It was not by accident or default that it proved to be one of the most inadequately reported events in contemporary India. In vain will you of the future thumb the yellowing pages in newspaper files of 1947. You will get nothing more

than screaming headlines and bald, soulless, and not even exhaustive descriptions. A dozen lesser political events were far more vividly reported. But the excitement of Independence Day defied the descriptive writer as well as the scoop-getter; here was the biggest *NEWS* of our times, but it could be 'covered' only with clichés like 'mammoth procession' and 'unprecedented enthusiasm'. The reporter could reduce to writing the surging mass emotions of August 15 no more successfully than you can bottle a typhoon or enclose a volcanic eruption.

August 15, 1947! How is one to describe the mood of a day that was not a day but the concentrated essence of what a whole people have worked for and fought for and yearned for and prayed for in the course of centuries? How is one to analyse the emotional complex formed out of the hopes and aspirations and yearnings—and may one add, the frustrations?—of a whole nation?

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'You are free!' Three words uttered by Premier Kher of Bombay from the balcony of the Government Secretariat, as the National Tricolour went up to replace the Union Jack of imperialism, exactly at 12 midnight—the 'zero hour' of the birth of Freedom! Three words—but they made history. Three words that were greeted with the loudest burst of cheering that I have ever heard on any single occasion, to the accompaniment of screaming ship—and factory—sirens and the tooting of electric car-horns.

'You are free!' This, then, was the key-note of the day on which you all were born. It was the theme-song of the Festival of Freedom that was inaugurated so dramatically and in such a blaze of lights on the midnight of August 14/15.

'You are free!' 'You are free!' The sirens seemed to scream and the car-horns seemed to screech and the gay crowds in the streets on that historic night seemed to answer back; 'We are free! We are free!'

'You are free!' The millions of lights that twinkled all over the city seemed to spell out the three magic words across the sky in a blaze of fire.

Palaces and palatial hotels, huts and chawls, banks and offices, shops and stores, offices and restaurants, aristocratic Marine Drive and Parel slums were all ablaze with festoons

of lights, illuminated flags, searchlights and floodlights. Midnight had been turned into midday and the gay crowds surged in the streets, with new-found joy on their faces—talking, laughing, greeting and embracing one another. This was a new Diwali, a new Idd, a new New Year—it was all the festivals of this land of festivals rolled into one. For this was the Festival of Freedom.

* * *

The moment belonged to the *people*. The common people! Workers from Parel, with their women and children, jammed in open trucks, went round and round the city all the way from Colaba to Mahim, waving flags, shouting *Jai Hind*, singing and laughing.

The moment belonged to youth. Since their birth they had been stifled by the atmosphere of slavery, they had grown tired of perpetual struggle, ever recurring hartals and strikes, processions and public meetings to protest against this or that. Today, at last, they could exult in the joy of Freedom, celebrate and shout and sing. And, characteristically, the two major student organizations marked their newly-established United Front by taking out a spectacular torchlight procession at midnight. From the Oval to Chaulpatty they carried aloft the blazing torches that symbolized so well the immortal flame of freedom as well as the burning passions of youth.

It was a moment of gay informality, of fraternization and friendliness. People went about offering 'Independence sweets' to everyone they met, and otherwise completely sober citizens greeted anyone they met in the street, shaking hands and embracing perfect strangers like long-lost brothers.

The midnight of August 14-15 was so tempestuous and colourful that many began to wonder if the celebrations to follow in the disillusioning light of day would not be an anticlimax.

But the midnight festivities proved to be but the prelude to the real celebrations that began on the morning of August 15. Again it was not the outward manifestations that were so significant—the early morning *prabhat pheris*, the flag salutations, the meetings, the several billion flags flying all over the city, the processions, the fire-works, the illuminations, the crowds in the streets. It was, again, the spirit of the people

that mattered—the gay, irrepressible, democratic spirit which seemed to sweep and surge across and over the entire metropolis.

And the most striking and spectacular demonstration of this spirit was the procession that marched in the afternoon from Gowaha Tank—the birthplace of the Congress—to the Oval in front of the Secretariat. The Beginning and the End. From a meeting of a handful of agitators in a classroom to Governmental power, democratically acquired through the votes of the people.

A million and a half crowded the streets to watch the procession—I did not see this procession—because I was in the procession, one of the half-million who marched with this Caravan of Freedom. But I can tell you that never has such a procession been taken out in the whole history of India. Never has such a procession been taken out anywhere else in the world—for only we, hot-blooded Indians, can give vent to our feelings of joyful ecstasy in such a rousing and tempestuous manner.

Many great and memorable processions have been taken out by the Congress in the past—to protest against this or that, or to honour our leaders. But this was different. Different in tone, in tempo, in composition.

It was not a political procession. It was a PEOPLES PROCESSION. And the people participated in it not like sheep or goats following the leaders—the traditional conception of the ‘dumb, driven masses’! We, the humblest of us, marched that day with our heads held high, with pride, with the sense of achievement, with the feeling of triumph. And we marched not in solemn silence, nor with tutored slogans on our lips. These were no tame hirelings of a political machine, these were the organizations of the PEOPLE, conscious of their new-won Freedom. And so we marched with flags and banners, pipe and drum and flute, shouting and singing and dancing, all along the five mile route.

It was a colourful, variegated procession—with flags carried on cars, motor cycles, horses, bicycles and decorated bullock carts—combining the mechanical inventiveness of modern India with the traditional picturesque pageantry of rural India. And as the three-mile procession slowly wended its way through crowded streets, planes of the INDIAN Air

force dived in roaring salute. (And tears of joy came into the eyes of many when they recalled that not long ago these very planes had been used by the enemies of our freedom to bomb the brave Pathans of the Frontier, to machine-gun the revolutionaries of 1942, and generally overawe the people with the might of imperialism!)

Here was a cross-section of Indian humanity—Congress volunteers, Desh Sevikas, with their traditions of heroism in non-violent 'warfare'; the All-India Women's Conference and other women's organizations; Nationalist Muslim volunteers from the working class area of Madanpura; students' associations; the Friends of the Soviet Union; athletes and sportsmen from gymnasiums and clubs; taxi-drivers and domestic servants.

Nor were the 'brain-workers' absent from this historic gathering of the people. Writers and artistes of the People's Theatre and National Theatre and the Prithvi Theatre, the Progressive Writers and the Gujarati Lekhak Milan—they were all there! And it was an inspiring sight to see a famous poet like Josh, a film celebrity like Prithviraj Kapoor with his film star son Raj, a dancer of international fame like Zohra Sehgal, and a front-rank writer like Krishenchender, singing and dancing in the streets to celebrate this happy occasion. In the past they had written about the people, depicted the life of the people in their poems in their books and their plays and their films. Today they had come in the midst of the people, as singers of their songs, not to sing *about* the people, but to sing *with* the people; not to dance a symbolic representation of life on the stage, but to dance the dance of freedom with the people in the streets.

Zohra Sehgal (who toured the world with Uday Shankar) has danced on the *de luxe* stages of London and Paris and New York. But the improvised dance she danced for five hours on the streets of Bombay on August 15, to the accompaniment of hand-clapping, amateur drumming and rhythmic intonation of *Quam Na'ra—Jai Hind, Inqulab Zindabad* and the ecstatic reiteration of *Gai Ghulami—Aai Azadi!* surely must be the most memorable, most thrilling, most inspired occasion of her career. And when an unknown working class youth stepped out of the crowd and started dancing with her, then a roar of delight went up from the

crowd—for then were the barriers dividing Art and the People finally completely removed!

This (and its auxiliary, the other procession that simultaneously marched from Parel to Shivaji Park) was no mere procession. It was INDIA on the march! For the first time one lost one's individuality and merged into the national consciousness.

This memorable experience, this unforgettable spectacle, this glorious vision, we pass on to you, the heirs of your country's freedom.

Never again shall such a procession, such a celebration, such exultation, be seen *unless* it be on the happy day when free INDIA and free PAKISTAN, by the free will of their respective peoples, decide to join together to create a UNITED INDIA. Then, of course, we may expect a celebration that will perhaps outshine even this great event we have just finished celebrating.

The generations before you made it possible to celebrate Independence Day on August 15, 1947. You, the children born on this great and historic and auspicious day, and your generation can make it possible for this political freedom to be translated into social justice, economic freedom and true democracy in both India and Pakistan, and thus bring about that RE-UNION for which the heart of every Indian aches today.

The torch of liberty is now handed over to you.

THE END IS THE BEGINNING

It was in 1941 that I started writing *The Last Page*. Six years may be no more than a drop in the ocean of eternity, but how the world has changed in this short period! On 22nd June, 1941, when the first *Last Page* appeared, Hitler's legions were goose-stepping across the Soviet border, the Congress leaders were in jail, and the Muslim League demand for Pakistan was regarded as a bluff and a manoeuvre for political bargaining. On 22nd August,

1947, as I write these lines, the first contingent of British troops to 'Quit India' is embarking for England the former seditionists and jailbirds constitute the first Government of free India, and Pakistan is a week-old reality. Between these two dates lies one of the most eventful epochs of human history—the epoch of the fall of Fascism and Nazism, of the discovery and first use of the Atomic Bomb, of the beginnings, however feeble, of a World Government, of the culmination of India's long and unique struggle for national freedom in the partition of the country and the transfer of power from Britain to the two Dominions of India and Pakistan.

It is this epoch, a significant and compact segment of time, that is chronicled in the preceding pages. From June 22, 1941, to August 15, 1947, from the invasion of Russia to the emancipation of India—the world has gone through one of the most amazing phases of human evolution. The declaration of Indian independence on August 15 seems historically an apposite and, indeed, striking *finale* to conclude this chronicle.

But the end of one era is also—and always—the beginning of another. The struggle for freedom has ended. But freedom has just begun. The preservation of the newly-won freedom against attacks from within and from without, the enlargement of its scope in terms of social justice and economic betterment of the masses, the need for a cultural renaissance—all these impose fresh responsibilities on all of us. The tasks of reconstruction are as important and as difficult as the struggle to wrest power from unwilling imperialist hands. The recent outbursts of communal fanaticism and frenzy have laid waste big areas in the country. Tens of thousands have died. Millions have been uprooted, rendered homeless. Unspeakable horrors have been perpetrated on both sides. Exchange of populations, the miserable plight of refugees on either side, the perilous insecurity of the minorities, the severe blow to national economy, the food scarcity and the impending famine—these problems are big enough to engage the Governments of India and Pakistan for the next ten, if not twenty, years. But far more important is the problem raised by the dehumanization of vast masses of our fellow-

countrymen, Hindus and Muslims and Sikhs, who today are demented with hate and violence and murder-lust. They have to be pacified and reclaimed for humanity, and the values of sanity, tolerance and good-neighbourliness have to be restored to them.

In such an atmosphere, old problems, old values, old formulae, and old slogans are hopelessly out of date. 'Freedom', in the very hour of its achievement, is tinged with irony and disillusion. 'Unity' has become a hollow mockery. 'Imperialism' has changed its tactics and can hardly be recognized as Mombatten publicly salutes the tricolour of revolt. 'Non-violence' has gone up in flames in the holocaust of East and West Punjab. Within less than a week, the hectic jubilation of August 15 seems in retrospect to have been a mirage and an illusion.

Many of our illusions, indeed, are dead and buried for ever. Gone is our complacent faith in the essentially non-violent and peaceful nature of our illiterate, superstition-ridden peasantry; gone the belief that Hindu and Muslim lived in idyllic peace and tranquillity in the countryside, away from the turmoils of city politics; gone is the fond hope that Imperialism had really changed its spots and would relinquish power peacefully without a fight—without making us fight! But the death of these illusions can be all to the good. It can restore cold reason to the atmosphere of emotional politics, it can help us to have a clearer vision in the future. If only these illusions had not died so suddenly and so violently! If only we could have been disillusioned without the cost of so many human lives!

Thus we step across the bloody threshold of history. And we shall be better able to find our way in the future if we have a clearer perspective of the past. This book will have served its purpose if it affords to some extent the correct appraisal of the critical years we have just gone through. For the past lives on in the present and the present in the future. There is neither end nor beginning.

Bombay,

22nd August '47

